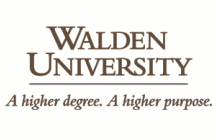

2015

Supporting Elementary Teachers In Effective Writing Instruction Through Professional Development

Whitney Nash Young
Walden University

Walden University

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Whitney Young

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee
Dr. Lucy Pearson, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty
Dr. Roberta Albi, Committee Member, Education Faculty
Dr. Paul Englesberg, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer

Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

Walden University
2015

Abstract

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Through Professional Development

by

Whitney Nash Young

Ed.S, Walden University, 2013

MA, University of Georgia, 2011

BS, Kennesaw State University, 2009

Proposal Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

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Abstract

Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for writing have created a challenge for teachers at an urban elementary school as they struggled to provide effective writing instruction to support the rigorous expectations of the standards. The purpose of this study was to explore elementary teachers' lived experiences of instruction and better understand instructional writing procedures and strategies. The conceptual framework of this study was based on Dennick's work for incorporating educational theory into teaching practices, which combined elements of constructivist, experiential, and humanist learning theories. Research questions investigated how teachers perceived the impact of the CCSS writing standards on their practice and what kinds of support they needed in order to effectively support writing instruction. A phenomenological design was selected to capture the lived experiences of participants directly associated with CCSS writing instruction. The study included 6 individual teacher interviews and a focus group session of 6 teachers who met the criteria for experience in Grades 3-5 at the elementary school. Data were coded and then analyzed to determine common themes that surfaced from the lived experiences of teachers including the need for training in writing instruction, the impact of common core standards on the increased rigor of current writing instruction, a lack of PD at the local school, and instructor challenges with differentiated writing instruction. A job-embedded professional development model was designed to support teachers with effective writing instruction and improve teacher practice at the local school, the district, and beyond. When fully implemented, this professional development may provide elementary teachers with research-based writing strategies that will support the rigor of CCSS standards and college and career readiness.

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Dedication

I dedicate this study to my mother who has been my inspiration throughout my doctoral journey. Her selfless spirit and wealth of knowledge continue to positively impact me as I grow throughout my educational career. I am fortunate to have her as a role model both personally and professionally.

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Thank you to my husband for always supporting my dreams and knowing exactly what to say to keep me moving forward. Thank you to my father for always being a positive role model as a lifelong learner and dreamer. I would also like to thank my sister who has a true servant's heart and has always made me proud.

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Special thanks to Yvonne Frey who afforded me many opportunities to grow in my practice as I served under her leadership. I would also like to thank Dr. Ricardo Quinn for modeling what it truly means to be a servant leader. Additionally, I would like to thank my colleague, Dr. Leslie Retchko, for your friendship and support throughout our doctoral journey together.

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Section 1: The Problem

For the past 10 years under the mandates of No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001), reading instruction has taken precedence over writing instruction in the elementary grades. But with implementation of the CCSS (CCSS, 2010), the emphasis on reading and writing instruction became equal. In order for writing instruction to become 50% of an instructional day in the elementary classroom, teachers must have the knowledge and training to explicitly teach writing skills, but also how to integrate and apply these skills in content areas, such as science and social studies.

In a school where writing scores have historically been in the top 10% of the county's 77 elementary schools, recent scores have declined and put the school in the bottom 50% (X County Public Schools, 2014). Up to now, writing has typically been taught in isolation and in a formulaic way to prepare students to meet requirements on the high-stakes writing assessment for promotion to middle school (X County Public Schools, 2014). The Georgia State Writing Assessment has been administered each March; it includes the following domains: ideas, organization, style, and conventions (Georgia Department of Education, 2014). Teachers have learned over time to teach specific strategies that address each domain. A student's average score in each domain determines her overall score: does not meet (below 200), meets (200-249), or exceeds (250-350). Schools are ranked and receive points based on these writing scores. With implementation of CCSS , a new high-stakes test is being developed. The Georgia Department of Education is in the process of developing an assessment that is equivalent to the literacy assessment available through Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). This new high-stakes assessment will require students to write at a higher level of sophistication than previously required. Teachers are concerned about their lack of knowledge

and training to teach writing in order to meet the new mandates as students will be required to write responses to summaries, non-fiction articles, and images.

The writing achievement of elementary students across the United States is a concern. According to the National Commission on Writing, "The level of writing in the United States is not what it must be. In this digital age, all of us need to be able to communicate effectively through writing" (as cited in *The College Board*, 2013, p. 1). According to an article published in *USA Today* (Report: State employees' lack of writing skills, 2005), state employees' lack of ability to write cost individual states approximately $250,000 a year in remedial writing instruction resulting in indirect costs of unacceptable writing by employees as they cost tax payers even more. In states that have adopted the CCSS, these standards have taken precedence over the educational mandates of NCLB from approximately 2001-2010. While the CCSS are not mandatory for any state, states that adopt them are no longer bounded by NCLB (CCSS, 2014). Writing was not an emphasis in the NCLB initiative, and it was not a mandate for educators in United States classrooms to follow in the curriculum.

Rationale

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

Georgia state writing test scores of students in grades 3 and 5 at a local school have declined over the past year. In the years 2011-2012, 41.2% of fifth grade students exceeded curricular expectations by scoring over 250 points (Georgia Department of Education, 2014). In 2012-2013, the number of "exceeds" scores dropped to 34% (Gwinnett County Public Schools, 2014). A lack of understanding in the decrease of scores generated frustration among teachers.

Conversations between myself and teachers of students in grades 3, 4, and 5 about writing scores revealed their frustrations with writing instruction. They wanted strategies that

would work for all students; they wanted to be able to monitor students' progress, and they wanted to fit writing into their intense schedules. Teachers were struggling with how to teach writing skills during their writing instruction block and how to apply the skills by integrating writing into the heavy content areas. For writing to encompass at least 50% of the instructional day, writing in the content areas is a must.

With an eye toward an improved ranking among the school system's elementary schools, the local school has established high expectations for student writing achievement. School administrators were concerned about writing scores in comparison with other schools in the system with similar demographics.

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

Education reform, as prompted by the CCSS, has generated concern among school administrators and teachers across the country (Calkins, Ehrenworth, & Lehan, (2012. This recently adopted mandate is not one taken lightly by district leaders, local school administrators, and teachers. In fact, although many reform efforts, historically, were met with lukewarm response and follow-through, CCSS cannot be easily dismissed. "Deep wells of concern among teachers" (as cited in Gewertz, 2013, p.1) about the lack of preparedness to implement CCSS has been revealed in a survey conducted by the Editorial Projects in Education (EPE) Research Center. Approximately 50% of the participants indicated that they did not feel prepared to teach the new standards, particularly when planning instruction for English language learners or students with special needs (Gewertz, 2013).

In the United States, 45 states, the District of Columbia, four territories, and the Department of Defense Education Activity have adopted CCSS (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010); this bold initiative is

intended to increase the rigor of instruction delivered by teachers and to increase the learning expectations of students in grades K-12 in literacy and math. The revelation of the majority of states adopting CCSS has teachers scrambling to address the writing, speaking, listening, and language standards designed to scaffold students' acquisition of literacy skills.

CCSS are specific about what teachers are to teach in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language skills as each contribute to literacy in its entirety. However, the CCSS do not specify how to teach these new rigorous standards. The challenge is for schools to provide teachers with adequate resources and professional development to enable them to successfully meet the goals as prescribed in the standards. A lack of professional knowledge in writing instruction can lead to ineffective practices and negative impact on student achievement.

Writing is important academically, psychosocially, and economically in order for individuals to achieve success, but the typical writing instruction and assessment in public schools in the United States typically does not reflect practices that develop successful writers (Mo, Kopke, Hawkins, Troia, & Olinghouse, 2014). CCSS require teachers in grades K-12 to increase the rigor of writing by planning and delivering effective instruction that will support students in mastery of literacy standards.

The most significant change for literacy teachers is the mandates that have been generated for writing instruction. NCLB (2001) emphasized phonemic awareness, vocabulary development, fluency, and minimum comprehension—not writing. Thus, for about a decade, the lack of emphasis on writing instruction has reduced students' ability to write. In addition, the high level of instructional skills needed to implement CCSS writing standards reveals teachers' the current lack of training.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined for clarity and understanding.

6 + 1 Trait Writing®: A writing model of instruction and assessment that comprises seven key qualities that define quality writing: ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, conventions, and presentation (Culham, 2003).

Common Core State Standards: A set of standards in mathematics and language arts that integrate real world problem solving and inquiry to promote rigorous learning in all grades across the nation (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).

Informational Writing: A form of written expression where the author informs the reader on the topic at hand and supports the topic with facts and details (Buckner, 2005). Also known as functional or procedural writing

Narrative Writing: Written expression that tells a story to entertain the reader and contains an introduction, rising action, climax, falling action, and conclusion.

Opinion Writing: Written expression that convinces the reader to agree with the author's claim or to persuade the reader to understand a specific point of view of the topic at hand. Also referred to as argument or persuasive writing.

Spiraling Curriculum: Content that is introduced gradually in specific grade levels and is built upon as students advance to the next grade level

Writing Workshop: A framework for teaching writing that includes a modeled lesson taught by the teacher, student independent practice, and student share and respond (Buckner, 2005).

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study focused on the experiences of the teacher participants with effective writing instruction. Participants had the opportunity to convey how they feel, what they need to do, and what can be done to provide them with effective writing instructional practices and strategies.

The results of the study were expected to be used to help the local school administration and the district to determine what teachers need to implement effective writing instruction. The goal of this research study was to examine teachers concerns, resulting from their lived experiences and efforts to provide effective writing instruction for students.

The study provided positive social change for students, teachers, and administrators at the local school by providing a variety of effective writing instruction methods and strategies for classroom instruction. Additionally, this study provided students with writing instruction that will enhance their achievement and improve the overall scores of the student body. The expected outcomes of the study were improved writing instruction, increased student success in writing as measured by state mandated testing, and an increase in teacher knowledge and training of implementation of the CCSS writing standards.

The CCSS mandate that the emphasis on reading and writing are equally important to the curriculum of students in kindergarten through the 12th grade.

Additionally, CCSS requires classroom teachers in grades K-12 to provide writing instruction for students using methods in which they are not currently trained. In this study, teachers participated in individual interviews and a focus group session to glean the possible concerns of the rigor of the new writing standards and increasing writing to 50% of the instructional day. The traditional methods of teaching writing fall short of meeting the writing standards contained in

the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI). “Traditional instruction does not develop all the knowledge writers need — in large measure because the focus of instruction is on composing particular assignments rather than on developing robust conceptual and strategic knowledge that transfers to new composing situations” (Smith, Jeffrey, Wilhelm, & Fredrickson, 2013, p. 8). The CCSS writing standards require teachers to integrate writing into the different content areas of the curriculum and transition from isolated writing instruction for a small block of the instructional day to 50% of the day.

In order for students to rise to the expectations of the writing standards as defined in the CCSS for Georgia, it will be critical for teachers to deconstruct the writing standards and gain a clear understanding of what students are expected to know and be able to achieve. To be able to provide students with effective writing instruction of the standards, it is important for teachers to possess the best practices and skills necessary to deliver such instruction. The CCSSI has been thrust upon teachers in Georgia providing limited knowledge of skills and training in how to provide effective instruction in all areas, particularly writing, which is expected to encompass at least 50% of the instructional day. Due to the training of basic writing skills of participants as students themselves, teachers are diverse in their own ability as writers. The knowledge and training attained through teacher preparation programs and professional development vary as well. In addition, the success or lack of success as a writing teacher in the classroom impacts a teacher’s ability to provide effective writing instruction for students. It is important for teachers to be honest with themselves as they reflect upon the knowledge, training, and experiences they currently possess with their attempt to successfully implement the CCSS writing standards and the skills needed to be able to provide effective instruction for their students.

Through this phenomenological study, the lived experiences of the participants who are classroom teachers, shared common concerns and lived experiences in regards to the implementation of the CCSS writing standards. Consequently, with participants sharing their lived experiences of the knowledge and training acquired through teacher preparation programs and professional development for support in providing effective writing instruction for students, a variety of challenges were conveyed through conversations and were documented. Providing participants with the opportunity to convey their thoughts, feelings, and concerns about the CCSS writing standards and the rigor of the instructional expectations allowed for further investigation of research based strategies and practices to provide students with effective writing instruction for achieving mastery of the CCSS writing standards.

Research Questions

A phenomenological design was chosen for this study because its purpose was to understand (a) the lived experiences of participants, (b) the writing instructional practices they have developed as classroom teachers through college coursework and professional development, and (c) how they perceive the CCSS writing standards will impact their instruction.

The following research questions were used to drive this study:

1. How do teachers perceive the impact of the CCSS writing standards on their current writing instructional practices?
2. What do teachers feel they need in order to provide effective writing instruction that supports the CCSS writing expectations?

Conceptual Framework

A researcher's conceptual framework establishes a foundation for the derivation of key concepts, theoretical perspectives, and a practical context in which a study is developed (Berman, 2013). The conceptual framework of this study was based on Dennick's (2012) tips for incorporating educational theory into teaching practices which combined elements of constructivist, experiential, and humanist learning theories. These 12 tips demonstrated ways to develop theoretical ideas into practical consequences and included the activation of prior knowledge, misconceptions, collaboration, active learning, responsibilities of the learner, communities of practice, reflection, skills and attitudes, hypothesis testing, respect ideas, self-efficacy, and building relationships (Dennick, 2012). Therefore, these theories collectively address how teachers activate prior knowledge and experiences in order to make a connection to new learning.

Tips on the activation of prior knowledge, misconceptions, collaboration, active learning, and responsibilities of the learner are grounded in constructivist theory as learners gain knowledge and understanding through the connection of new learning experiences (Dennick, 2012). The tips for incorporating educational theory into teaching practices support the challenges expressed through anecdotal conversations by teachers at the local school regarding the lack of understanding of the CCSS for writing and the lack of time to fully understand the standards within the context of teaching and learning. The constructivist theory was further influenced by Dewey (1938) who believed that learners should play an active role in the learning process. Due to an absence of teacher involvement with the creation of CCSS, teachers are weary of their purpose and sustainability compared to past standards (McComiskey, 2012). Teachers have attempted to close the gap in understanding the purpose and fulfilling expectations of CCSS

in comparison to what they knew to be true with NCLB standards (Graham, Gillespie, & McKeown, 2012). Prior knowledge of NCLB standards have contributed to misconceptions and pre-conceived notions of CCSS (McComiskey, 2012). Teachers at the local school were not active participants in creating the CCSS and struggle with the requirement of a new initiative being implemented in their classroom with sparse training and direction.

Common Core State Standards have made writing an important component of the school reform movement as they provide criteria for a variety of writing skills that students are expected to master at each grade level (Graham et al., 2012). Effectively teaching these writing skills can constitute a variety of strategies and instructional practices. For example, one of the CCSS in writing requires that students use evidence to inform, argue, and analyze for a variety of purposes and audiences (Hakuta, Santos, & Fang, 2013). It is the responsibility of teachers to determine how to effectively implement writing instruction by analyzing the standard and understanding what students are supposed to know and be able to do (Calkins et al., 2012). Teachers at the local school use instructional strategies that were successful with NCLB standards but have found them to be insufficient in supporting the CCSS writing standards.

Writing workshop is the current vehicle for teaching writing. The purpose of writing workshop is for teachers to provide students with the opportunity to write during the day based on the planning of effective instruction of specific skills in a whole group, small group, and individual setting (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). When teaching writing using the workshop model, teachers provide focused instruction to model the skill being taught in isolation, provide active engagement for guided instruction of the skill, additional learning through collaboration, and independent learning for proof of mastery (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). In a study that examined teachers' beliefs on implementing the balanced literacy framework, including writing workshop

as the overarching framework, researchers conveyed that teachers were inconsistent in their use of the routines, particularly with writing (Bingham & Hall-Kenyon, 2013). Many teachers see writing workshop as something students learn to do rather than a tool for lifelong success in writing (Ray & Laminack, 2001). As teachers rely on the knowledge and experiences they have acquired about writing instruction, they serve as transmitters of information.

According to Dennick's tenth tip, it is important to meet individuals at their current level of knowledge. If teachers believe they are transmitters of information, they need additional knowledge in the foundations of writing instruction to adapt more of a humanistic approach and provide more learning centered opportunities in writing (Dennick, 2012). The humanistic learning theory provides a pertinent model of the individual which reflects the constructivist theory of learning and embodies the belief that individuals will only achieve full potential when all needs are met (Dennick, 2012). According to Ray and Laminack (2012), there is a set of essential methodologies within the writing workshop which serve as a model for writing instruction: content choice, time, delivery of curriculum, collaboration, focused studies, publishing, high expectations, and management (Ray & Laminack, 2012). Needs of teachers include the understanding of these methodologies. Graves (1994) referred to these as fundamentals of writing instruction and believed that the fundamentals lay the foundation for the action carried out in the workshop's mini lesson. When teachers are informed of best practices and understand why writing is important, they are more likely to invest in the mastery of CCSS (Graham et al., 2013). Time and investment parallel to Dennick's tip of self-efficacy which relates self-esteem to values and beliefs.

The experiential learning theory (ELT) developed by Kolb (1984) attempts to provide a tool for transforming experiences into knowledge. Communities of practice, reflection, skills and

attitudes, and hypothesis testing are tips included in Dennick's (2012) pedagogical recommendations that appropriately align to the ELT as all four can provide relevant experiences in a working environment. Communities of practice can be defined by the methods local schools or grade levels choose to implement in writing instruction. Reflection on current knowledge and growth needed will help teachers make sense of how learning occurs (Dennick, 2012). Skills and attitudes will be formed and refined as effective writing instruction is defined, modeled, and practiced. In order for teachers to make the transition in their writing instruction, professional development and collaborating with fellow colleagues are key factors in their success to implement effective writing instruction based on CCSS (Brimi, 2012). Current practices of collaboration in the local school and district are somewhat new to teachers (Donk, 2004). With any new instructional standards and practices, teachers need support in the knowledge of the standards as well as instructional practices for effective planning and delivery of those practices (Pytash, 2012). Professional development provides teachers with the knowledge and training necessary to understand the rigor of the CCSS writing standards and how to fully implement the standards that may result in effective writing instruction and optimum learning for students.

Review of Literature

A review of literature was conducted using current sources from the previous five years. Databases used to search relative topics to the study included ERIC, Education Research Complete, and SAGE. Key terms used in the search included *common, core, standards, writing, effective, instruction, teacher, training, student, enhance,* and *achievement.*

Common Core State Writing Standards

CCSS have placed a tremendous emphasis on writing instruction and student expectations. The emphasis of the writing standards is for students to write across all disciplines, for real purposes, and to build a foundation for college readiness (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). The time dedicated to writing instruction in classrooms may vary in public schools depending on the emphasis placed on writing, the knowledge and training of teachers, and the attitude of individual teachers about their ability to effectively differentiate writing instruction for all students. McCarthey (2008) conducted a study which analyzed the impact of NCLB on teachers' implementation of writing instruction and perceptions towards writing in schools of various income levels. Data from the study indicated a variation among the samples in the study. Interviews and observations of 18 teachers were used to collect the data. The data revealed that teachers involved in the study exemplified one of three practices. Some teachers solely implemented writer's workshop. Other teachers were integrating writing across the content areas. Then, there were teachers who taught the different writing genres in isolation or used programs that were designed for teaching writing.

One example of this finding was that teachers at two schools implemented daily writing instruction through the use of writer's workshop or integration of content areas (McCarthey, 2008). There appears to be inconsistencies of writing practices in classrooms which lead to the importance of the effectiveness of these practices and identifying those that are supportive of the rigor of the new CCSSI for writing. Consequently, in the study, teachers at Bailey School focused on writing genres and planning for writing through the use of genres based on prompts (McCarthey, 2008). The differences found between these schools are only a small example of the

different writing instruction practices that occur in the United States. CCSS intend to support teachers across the country with a guideline for writing instruction expectations and to provide students with common writing achievement goals.

In CCSS guidelines, the amount of time teachers are to focus on reading instruction is equal to that of writing instruction. The standards represent a new shift in writing instruction in terms of what students are supposed to know and do (Hakuta et al., 2013). Writing is expected to be the vehicle in which most reading instruction and reading assessment occur (Calkins et al., 2012). According to CCSS (2010),

> The standards for grades K-5 offer a focus for instruction each year to help ensure that students gain adequate mastery of a range of skills and applications. Each year in writing, students should demonstrate increasing sophistication in all aspects of language use, from vocabulary and syntax to development and organization of ideas, and they should address increasingly demanding content and sources. Students advancing through the grades are expected to meet each year's grade-specific standards and retain or further develop skills and understandings mastered in preceding grades. (p. 1)

In order to successfully implement the CCSS writing standards and ensure that students have the opportunity to master the standards, teachers will need to receive additional training and learn new teaching practices. According to Hung-His Wu, there is a need for intense professional development for teachers in order for the common core standards to be successfully implemented in schools (as cited in Sawchuck, 2012). Furthermore, providing the necessary training will be time consuming and teachers will not acquire the skills overnight (Sawchuck, 2012). This undertaking is a major challenge for educators in public schools across the United States because of the intensity of professional development required to prepare classroom teachers for

implementing the CCSS effectively. The challenge of accomplishing the feat of preparing the country's 3.2 million public schools of grades K-12 prepared to teach the standards is enormous (Sawchuck, 2012). In addition, teachers need to be well-versed with a complete understanding of the standards and the specific skills that are to be mastered by students (Graham et al., 2012). The expeditious implementation along with the lack of training of the CCSS in Georgia public schools puts classroom teachers at a major disadvantage in their attempts to provide the most effective instruction for students.

There are 10 CCSS anchor standards for writing that guide instruction for teachers. These standards span across grades K-12 and spiral throughout the school year. CCSS are aligned both vertically (grade-to-grade progression) and horizontally to provide grade-level skills acquisition (CCSSI, 2014). Teachers will benefit from unpacking the standards to fully comprehend the process of writing instruction. The goal is to lead students to mastery over their years of education in grades K-12 and be prepared to enter college.

The importance of all teachers in every grade level being proficient in the knowledge of the writing standards and the expectations for their students, therefore, is essential. Additionally, it is crucial for teachers to acquire the teaching skills necessary to deliver effective writing instruction for students that meet the expectations of the CCSS writing standards. Since the writing standards build upon the previous year's instruction, teachers must embrace CCSS and fully implement the writing standards in order to prevent gaps in student learning.

The CCSS writing standards require teachers to teach three broad categories or types of writing including argumentation, informative, and narrative (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). Prior to CCSS, there were three major writing focuses referred to as genres of writing. CCSS refer to them as types of

writing. Teachers are expected to integrate writing into all content areas including the fine arts, science, social studies, math, and physical education (P.E.). Some teachers of art, music, and P.E. in K-5 are having difficulty determining how writing standards relate to their instruction (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). In order to understand the expectations of effective writing instruction, teachers must understand how the standards are constructed the expectations for students mastery. Common core writing standards focus on instructional expectations and not methods leaving teachers with a need for professional development to acquire strategies/methods for how to implement the writing standards (Calkins et al., 2012). The expectations of teaching writing standards are no longer solely the duty of the K-5 classroom teacher and the language arts teachers in grades 6-12. All teachers of students in K-12, no matter what subject they teach, are now required to make writing an integral part of their instruction.

The common core website provides an in-depth explanation of the writing standards along with anchor papers by type at every grade level as model writing that exemplifies the rigor at which students should be performing in writing. There are 10 writing anchor standards for grades K-12 (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). Anchor standard one explains the expectations of argument writing. Teachers at the local school have taught persuasive writing with the emphasis placed on the opinion of the writer with little to no emphasis on the opposing point of view (CCSSI, 2014). Argumentative writing requires that students think more deeply as they are to be able to write about an opposing view as well as their own opinion about topics. Informational writing is defined and explained in-depth in anchor standard two followed by narrative writing expectations in anchor standard three (CCSSI, 2014). CCSS have increased the focus of

informational writing and the amount of time students spend writing in the content areas. In anchor standard four, teachers are expected to model for students how to develop clear and coherent writing where organization and style align with the task, purpose, and audience (CCSSI 2014). Anchor standard five addresses how teachers will instruct students to enhance writing skills by planning, editing, and revising (CCSSI, 2014).

In addition, the use of technology, including the Internet, is discussed in anchor standard six (CCSSI, 2014). Using technology to produce and publish writing encourages student interaction and collaboration with fellow students. Access to computers for students at the local school is limited. The cost of implementing the technology standards will be a challenge for public schools as students require technology devices to practice these standards. Anchor standard seven addresses the expectation that students will conduct short, along with more in-depth research projects generated from focused questions and will demonstrate parallelism of the subject they are investigating (CCSSI, 2014). Anchor standards eight and nine provide teachers with guidelines for teaching students to gather relevant information when conducting research from print and digital sources, using credible sources to avoid plagiarism, and using evidence from the sources to support their analysis, reflection, and research (CCSSI, 2014).

Finally, anchor standard 10 describes the need to write routinely as part of the process over short time frames of a single sitting of a day or two as well as writing over extended time frames when students would be carrying out specific tasks (CCSSI 2014). The CCSS writing standards are rigorous and require a deep understanding by teachers of what they are expected to teach in order for students to reach mastery of each standard.

The CCSS also define the volume or rate at which students in K-12 should write. For example, fourth grade students are expected to produce one typed page in a sitting and fifth

grade students are expected to produce two typed pages in a sitting (CCSSI, 2014). The amount of time students are expected to spend on each of the three types of writing is included in the CCSS writing framework as well. Fifth grade students, for example, are required to spend 35% on narrative writing, 35% on informational writing, and 30 % on opinion and argument writing (CCSSI, 2014). In the past, writing instruction has been focused on the writing process where students would typically complete a writing piece over the span of a week or more. Calkins et al. (2012) described the high expectations for teaching writing in the common core standards:

> The most important thing about the CCSS is that they issue a call for extremely high levels of proficiency. One has to only look at the descriptors of what students are expected to do at each grade level, or more importantly, to glance at the sample text included in Appendix C on the common core website, to realize that the CCSS are calling for higher expectations in writing than those that have been commonplace. (p.107)

Within the CCSS (2010) guide created by writers, teachers are provided with examples of quality writing exemplars at each grade level K-12. These sample writings portray a higher rigor of writing than teachers have expected from students in the past. Students are expected to produce quality writing of this standard independently and consistently. "This quality of writing can be achieved by mandating the explicit instruction, opportunity for practice, centrality of feedback, assessment-based instruction, and a spiral curriculum that have all been a hallmark of a rigorous writing workshop" (Calkins et al., 2012, p.112). The writing workshop model is the expectation of the local school system for teachers to use for writing instruction; however, this method is not utilized by all teachers. In addition, writing is not taught consistently and pervasively throughout the local school. The main reason for the CCSS literacy standards is to prepare K-12 students to be able to read and write effectively in their college and career

endeavors as adults which has resulted in an increased focus on informational text, with 70% of reading and writing being informational text in grades 5-12 (Clark, Jones, & Reutzel, 2013). For teachers in grades K-5, narrative text in both reading and writing, have been the instructional focus due, in part, to the NCLB expectations and the training previously provided to teachers through teacher preparation coursework and professional development. In a research study of 98 institutions in 30 states in the U.S. with a sampling of 180 preservice teachers, only 21% of the programs in the sample institutions covered literacy topics adequately and more than half of the programs having limited to no coverage (Greenberg & Walsh, 2012). Teacher knowledge and training begins at the teacher preparation colleges, and the lack of coursework provided in effective literacy instruction can have a negative impact on a teacher's ability to provide effective writing instruction. In order for teachers to make the transition from traditional narrative writing, research is needed for intense training and the ability to scaffold instruction to meet the needs of all learners.

It is the expectation of the CCSS for writing to encompass of 50% of the instructional day. Teachers at the local school, through informal conversations in grades 3-5, voiced concern about this expectation because attempting to teach writing for 30-45 minutes daily is a challenge due to the tight schedules teachers already face, particularly in the content areas such as science and social studies. Integrating writing across the content areas would increase the amount of time for students to practice writing, but these teachers are unsure exactly how this instruction should occur.

Additionally, teachers are aware that assessments drive instruction, particularly the high stakes tests required by the state of Georgia in grades 3, 4, 5, 6, and 8 along with high school end of course tests. The new high stakes test being created based on CCSS for Georgia students will

be more performance based than multiple choice questioning. In order for teachers to make the shift in their instruction to performance based instruction and assessments, they will require training which is costly and time consuming (Boss, 2012). Boss also mentioned that when moving to a more performance based instruction, there is more time required to allow for conversation and assessing students. Once again, the CCSS mandates standards for teachers to teach with no instruction on how the standards are to be taught.

According to the writers of the CCSS, the standards were written to counsel teachers on what students need to learn, but teachers are not directed in how to teach the standards. Furthermore, the writers of the standards believe that teachers know best how to instruct. Therefore, local schools are charged with determining how teachers will effectively teach these standards (CCSSI, 2014). In general, teachers appreciate the flexibility to use their teaching skills to craft instruction, but the key factor is the time constraints along with the necessary strategies and best practices involved in creating their own curriculum. With the CCSSI, however, teachers will not only need to know what the standards mean but they will also seek training in new skills that will allow them to provide effective writing instruction across the curriculum.

Effective Writing Instruction

In a study of effective writing strategies, researchers concluded that there are a variety of evidence-based instructional procedures that will improve the writing of students in grades K-5 (Graham, Kiuhara, McKeown, & Harris, 2012). A meta-analysis study of writing instruction was conducted for elementary students to support the CCSS implementation. The writing standards require teachers in all grades, especially K-5, to change how writing is taught in classrooms across the country.

Gary and Olinghouse (2013) conducted a study on the CCSS and evidence-based educational writing practices in current classrooms. These researchers conveyed that "typical writing instruction and assessment in the United States generally does not reflect evidence-based writing practices" (p. 343). The focus of the CCSS writing standards is on written expression which will be an important focus for teacher training. Due to the most recent expectations of writing proficiency, the lack of evidence-based writing practices can prove to have a negative impact on student achievement in the classroom and beyond the K-12 classroom. According to self-reported data from a national sample of elementary teachers in 2008, they spent fewer than 10 minutes a day instructing students in the planning and revising strategies used when the students wrote stories (Cutler & Graham, 2008). With CCSS expectations requiring students to be actively engaged in writing at least 50% of an instructional day, teachers will be expected to increase the amount of writing for students opposed to the practices of the past where writing is taught in isolation for a specific period of the day.

Along with the implementation of evidence-based practices is the need for integrating technology into writing instruction. The use of technology in writing is a CCSS writing standard. Gary and Olinghouse (2013) reported that 85% of adolescents use some form of electronic personal device as a form of communication. Through observation at the local school and visiting other schools in the district, a vast number of students use some form of technological device to communicate with others even at the elementary school level. Many of these evidence-based writing tools and practices are discussed in the next section of the literature review.

With the implementation of the writing standards mandated by CCSS, it is evident to classroom teachers across the nation that the writing instruction practices used in the past will not be sufficient to meet the needs of students. Dunn (2011) examined teachers' perspectives on

current writing instruction and strategies in all grade levels that primarily focused on struggling writers and provided suggestions to enhance writing instruction. Writing instructional practices included self-talks, guided practice, and modeling of skills. Modeling of skills, guided practice, and discussion with students contributed to a more balanced literacy approach to teaching writing. Graves (1994) called these instructional practices the fundamentals of writing. He believed that all fundamentals must be explicitly taught in a balanced literacy approach in order to effectively teach writing strategies and allow students to practice writing in context (Graves, 1994). The concepts of step-by-step instruction and the use of technological aids addressed differentiation in writing instruction and the importance in meeting the needs of all students (Dunn, 2011). Additionally, challenges faced throughout the study included large class sizes, the need for small group and individual conferencing, and integrating reading and writing when students struggled in both subjects. Once again, the need for writing practices and procedures to plan and deliver effective instruction that includes best practices and how to instruct student on writing across the curriculum would be beneficial to teachers.

Graham, McKeown, Kiuhara, and Harris (2012) identified effective writing instructional practices in elementary grades through a meta-analysis study on writing interventions. These interventions were centered on writing processes, skills, and knowledge. Students who struggle with writing must receive interventions to support acquisition of skills and understanding of written expression in order for them to grow as writers. In the study conducted by Troia, Shin-Ju, Cohen, and Monroe (2011), elementary teachers were observed during a year-long study in the writing workshop setting. Strategies were analyzed as well as student data to determine strengths and weaknesses of the instruction. Teachers were interviewed based on instructional reflections and professional development preparation. The act of teachers taking the time to reflect on their

instructional practices and identifying their strengths and weaknesses will inform them of the success or lack of in their instruction. The rigor of the CCSS, particularly in writing since it is the major shift as outlined by the CCSS guide, calls for teachers to reflect on their current teaching practices and the training they need to fully implement the initiative successfully.

Troia et al. (2011) contributed classroom management, student engagement, and differentiated instructional procedures as factors to determine the success of effective writing instruction. With large class sizes being an issue in some classrooms as mentioned in the research, teachers are faced with managing the vast number of students in their classrooms as they attempt to engage students in active learning along with differentiating the needs of their students. Werderich and L'Allier (2011) discussed merging genres of writing through teaching of a variety of reading strategies in mentor texts. Strategies included capturing a moment in time, portraying character traits, and integrating fictional genres. The suggested strategies allowed students to be more expressive as writers and to provide teachers with teaching resources.

Through conversations with effective school leaders, Zumbrunn and Krause (2012) identified a national concern for writing instruction and they provided suggestions for best practices for teaching writing. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) recently revealed that writing scores were below proficiency in most states and businesses are finding that new hires are weak in writing skills (Zumbrunn & Krause, 2012). With teachers understanding the power of their own writing beliefs, or skills, effective writing instruction encourages student engagement and motivation. Instruction begins with clear planning that can also be flexible, since writing instruction occurs daily, and effective writing instruction is a scaffolding collaboration between teacher and student (Zumbrunn & Krause, 2012). The planning efforts by the teacher to actively engage the learners, manage classroom behaviors,

differentiate instruction, have the knowledge of the standards and expectations, and the training of effective writing instruction is key to their success as teachers of writing.

Hall and Grisham-Brown (2011) examined the attitudes and beliefs of pre-service teachers regarding writing preparation and instruction. The results illustrated common themes that teachers do not agree on specific methods when teaching writing and not all preschool and elementary teachers felt equipped with adequate knowledge to effectively teach writing to students. Many teachers view writing as an additional task during the school day rather than a lifelong learning process for students (Ray & Laminack, 2001). Workshop is a process that is refined daily as students explicitly practice individualized goals based on standards. Future study implications discussed the need for common strategies for writing instruction. Again, teacher knowledge and training of effective practices in writing instruction are keys to providing effective instruction for students.

The attitudes and beliefs of teachers hinge on their ability to provide effective instruction for students. In a study conducted by Corkett, Hatt, and Benevides (2011), a correlation was revealed between teacher and student self-efficacy within reading and writing instruction and performance. The efficacy was assessed through questionnaires that evaluated how prepared students perceived they were in accomplishing a task in reading and writing. Teachers were also given surveys to assess their perception of adequacy in effectively teaching reading and writing through the use of best practices and district methods. The researchers found that the self-efficacy of students directly affected the ability to learn while the self-efficacy of teachers was affected by their perception of their ability to effectively teach reading and writing (Julie et al., 2011). Teachers' perceptions of their ability to teach may vary, but possessing the knowledge

and training to be effective teachers is a necessity for full implementation of the CCSS and the success of students.

Best practices in writing instruction can be found when looking at student achievement in writing, both formally and informally. Cutler and Graham (2008) conducted a national survey that included a random sample of primary grade teachers. The number of teachers who taught writing in the study using a combination of process writing and skills instruction included 72% of the faculty (Cutler & Graham, 2008). The variability became present when teachers were asked about the consistency of using specific skills. The following strategies were recommended by the primary teachers for enhancing and improving writing in primary grades: Increase in writing time, teach a variety of writing strategies, increase the usage of expository writing, explore ways to motivate students to write, make school to home connections in writing, incorporate more technology in writing lessons, and provide more professional development opportunities for writing instruction (Cutler & Graham, 2008). The recommended strategies in the study provided a background for current topics of writing frameworks and instructional strategies. It would be interesting to see a study such as this one carried out from the study conducted by Corkett et al. (2011) involving teacher efficacy in writing instruction. While teacher efficacy can affect writing instruction, best practices instilled through teacher training and supplied through resources would perhaps have a positive impact on teacher efficacy.

The 6 + 1 Trait Writing model (Culham, 2003) introduced writing as a set of specific skills or traits including "ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, conventions, and presentation" (Coe, Hanita, Nishioka, & Smiley, 2011, p. ix). These are the competencies taught and assessed through the formulaic writing at the local school. The skills were taught in isolation during a writing block of time daily. Coe et al. (2011) conducted a cluster-randomized

experimental study based on teacher, student, and school willingness to participate in the 6 + 1 Trait Writing model. The mixed-methods design combined quantitative methods of data collection using student data, teacher data, and comparisons between treatment and control groups with qualitative methods of data collection using student essays, teacher surveys, and student surveys. Two primary questions drove this exploratory study: "What is the impact of the 6 + 1 Trait Writing on grade 5 student achievement in particular traits of writing?" and "Does the impact of the 6 +1 Trait Writing ® on grade 5 student achievement vary according to student gender or ethnicity?" (Coe et al., 2011, p. 11). The researchers found that an analytic model revealed a significant increase in student writing scores in schools that introduced the 6 +1 Trait Writing ® model during the first trial year (Coe et al., 2011). Exploratory analyses found positive statistical differences between students who participated in the 6 +1 Trait Writing ® implementation and those who did not, particularly in the domains of ideas, sentence fluency, and conventions (Coe et al., 2011). The importance of teaching writing strategies and specific skill sets within writing is further supported by this study. The seven traits implementation proved that these best practices were beneficial to teachers as strategies for effectively teaching writing. Best practices stand the test of time and can be adapted for a variety of learners. The 6 + 1 Trait writing model serves as a current framework and instructional model for writing at the elementary level.

The increased focus on informational writing in the CCSSI is challenging teachers in their current teaching practices. Donovan and Smolkin (2011) believed that as students advance from one grade level to the next, their informational writing will mature as long as teachers instruct using a purposeful instructional framework. CCSS have influenced the use of more non-fiction mentor texts when teaching writing skills to expose students to a culture of non-fiction

and informational knowledge. The knowledge is then used in students' writing and to enhance ideas and style. Donovan and Smolkin (2011) noted that "students' writing progressed along various continua toward a mature form" (p. 406) through experiences. Implementing non-fiction texts and resources in students' writing routines will provide these experiences. Furthermore, Donovan and Smolkin (2011) created a framework based on student writing samples from K-5 informational reports. The framework included categories used to identify writing strategies within the reports as well as strategies for teaching students ways to enhance their reports. These categories included reading identification strategies to identify key facts and details most appropriate for the writing topic at hand. As the strategies were implemented in a fourth grade class, success was measured by the increase in students' writing performance on formal and informal informational writing assessments (Donovan & Smolkin, 2011). Their study indicated that it is crucial for teachers to comprehend the development of elementary students' writing development and to carry out a varied, meaningful, and rigorous instructional framework.

Writing is a skill essential to students and their long-term success both educationally and professionally. "Writing today is not a frill for the few, but an essential for the many" (Graham, Bollinger, Booth, D'Aoust, MacArthur, McCutchen, & Olinghouse, 2012, p. 6). Graham et al. (2012) produced a practice guide for teachers on how to teach elementary students to be effective writers. The guide focused on four recommendations or strategies for writing instruction based on research and personal experiences of the researchers: provide time each day for students to write on their own, teach students the correct steps in the writing workshop process, teach handwriting, spelling, sentence structure, and typing, and create a positive environment (Graham et al., 2012). This study provided a variety of practical lessons and strategies for each recommendation. The practice guide is a valuable resource for teachers of writing and it contains

research-based practices to include in a future research study on basic ways to enhance writing instruction.

A variety of current research provides useful strategies and resources to use when implementing writing instruction. Weinstein (2013) reviewed professional resources on best practices in writing instruction, focusing on the influence of CCSS in writing. The study focused on how CCSS no longer include formulaic writing in the form of five paragraph essays centered on a specific prompt. Instead, non-fiction texts with more rigorous text complexity are being used as anchor reading passages to engage student thinking in writing. The intent is that students will learn to write about more real-world scenarios and be able to respond to non-fiction passages in a variety of content areas. Teachers will need to be equipped with new strategies to expose students to a higher level of text complexity as well as see models of integrating non-fiction texts with writing responses.

As new strategies are needed to successfully implement new state standards, some teachers are using graphic organizers and genre specific strategies to enhance writing instruction. In a study by McCarthey (et al., 2011) interviews were conducted with teachers in third and fourth grades to gain a deeper understanding of their current routines in writing instruction, teacher's beliefs towards writing, and the influences of professional development on their writing instruction. Teachers discussed the positive impact graphic organizers had on scaffolding writing instruction to meet the needs of all learners. Many of the interviewees taught writing using genres as a central theme or idea and then integrated other components of writing instruction such as conventions and organization (McCarthey et al., 2011). The use of graphic organizers and genre specific strategies have their place in writing instruction, but if writing is solely taught in this manner in isolation, the CCSS writing standards would not be met.

It is evident in research findings that effective writing instruction is needed to fulfill requirements of the CCSS and successfully lead students to mastery. While there are a variety of strategies to be used, it is important that teachers are properly trained in using each strategy and are given the necessary materials and feedback to have a positive impact on student achievement. The rigor of the CCSS expectations reach far beyond using writing one period a day in a writing workshop session. The modeling and student engagement that occur in an effective workshop session is considered best practices, but CCSS requires students to write beyond an isolated workshop and apply the standards. It is the intent of the CCSS writing standards to develop writing with students in every day learning across the curriculum. Writing is a part of many aspects of students' daily lives and does not occur just one segment of an instructional day. Therefore, teachers will need to adjust their instruction in order to develop students who are lifelong writers.

Effective Teacher Training to Enhance Student Achievement in Writing

When teachers are presented with new initiatives in education, some resist the change, some embrace it, and others such as veteran teachers may perceive the change as just another pendulum shift. According to the constructivist theory, the beliefs of teachers and how they view their teaching practices are instilled in them along with their resistance to change by the time they begin their college program (Woolley, Woolley, & Hosey, 1999). Teachers' beliefs about effective teaching practices with writing instruction at the local school will be examined in this proposed project study in order to establish if their attitudes developed through previous experiences with writing impact their instruction in the classroom.

With the implementation of the CCSS writing standards, teachers will need to take a close look at their teaching practices and how they align with the writing standards. For example,

the practice of integrating writing across the curriculum is not a new concept for teachers, but it is a practice that has not been an expectation until present. In a study where the attitudes of teacher candidates and their past experiences were examined, the results indicated that these experiences can impact the future of their instruction and the achievement of students in their classrooms (Robinson & Adkins, 2002). Teacher effectiveness in preparing students for success in writing is at stake with the implementation of new writing standards if the state and local district staff development departments fail to provide teachers with the knowledge of what they are teaching and the training to implement effective writing instruction. Effective writing instructional methods and strategies provide teachers with the tools needed to provide students with optimum learning and develop writing skills that will prepare them for success in life.

Assessing student writing in the local school until present has entailed students receiving a writing prompt from one of three genres identified as narrative, persuasive, and informational in which they scored Does Not Meet, Meets, or Exceed based on their ability to create a five-paragraph story that followed a prompt. The assessment occurred at the end of their fifth grade year with the results examined only to determine promotion to sixth grade. The new test being developed to assess student performance in writing (Georgia Milestones Assessment System) will require teachers to use assessments that match the standards with both formative and summative assessments, analyze student data, and use the data to drive their instruction.

The new CCSS writing standards require teachers to instruct beyond the five paragraph formulaic story. Teacher education programs can provide basic readiness of knowledge and skills to begin their classroom experience, but implementing change is dependent on the support and liberty that teachers are given in their own schools (Icy, 2011). Professional development provided by the Georgia State Department of Education along with the local staff development

department will play a crucial role in preparing teachers to fully implement the CCSS in order to provide effective writing instruction for students.

Effective writing instruction hinges upon the knowledge and training of the teacher. Brimi (2012) discussed the challenges faced in writing instruction with the growing pressure of standardized assessments. Although this study was conducted with high school teachers, it followed a similar design to this proposed study. Teachers were interviewed in focus groups and they were asked questions regarding their preparation to teach writing, their beliefs about writing instruction, and the needs they still had based on the lack of preparation or resources. The results revealed the stress of teaching writing along with the increased use of standardized assessments. The study yielded comprehensive results from interviews and suggested the possible need for future research to be conducted in all grades.

Consequently, using student achievement scores in writing, teachers from primary schools in New Zealand examined their scores and used an inquiry process to identify strengths and weaknesses in their own pedagogy (Limbrick, Buchanan, Goodwin, & Schwarz, 2010). Data collection and analysis indicated certain areas of writing instruction needed attention. Teachers were able to use these areas to enhance their effectiveness in the classroom (Limbrick et al., 2010). Being a reflective practitioner is necessary for teachers to improve their practice.

In a study conducted by Olthouse (2012), eighth grade gifted students were interviewed to gain a deeper understanding of how students most effectively learn and apply writing strategies. Eight common themes emerged from interviews with eight students, and they included the need for structure, form, use of mentor texts; the need for feedback; to connect with other writers; the need for self-discovery; use of creativity; and the need to reflect in writing (Olthouse,

2012). The use of mentor texts, conferring with students on their writing behaviors, and reflection are all areas of need in training teachers to provide effective writing instruction.

Novice teachers must be prepared to teach writing when they enter the classroom. In order to do so, they need to possess the knowledge and understanding of the CCSS writing standards as well as strategies and methods for delivering effective writing instruction. Pytash (2012) discussed the needs of writing preparation of pre-service teachers and the strategies they used to help students become better writers. The strategies used in these pre-service programs were also strategies suggested for use when teaching writing to younger students. Pre-service teachers learned the importance of building strong writing foundations and were encouraged to establish visions for writing instruction and a focus for their future students. The modeling of writing was discussed, specifically the importance of modeling basic strategies with high-quality anchor texts.

Teacher education courses provide theory for teacher candidates and have the potential to instill confidence in a teacher's repertoire of skills. Street and Stang (2009) examined the effect the National Writing Project (NWP) had on preparing in-service and pre-service teachers to teach writing to students and the teachers' confidence level to deliver writing strategies to students. The project provided an intense level of professional development that also trained teachers to become leaders in writing instruction. Professional development sessions included a central self-discovery component where teachers learned more about themselves as writers and how to uncover writers' strengths. Meaningful professional development provides teachers with the skills they need to teach writing.

Professional development in writing instruction can positively impact teacher performance and confidence to effectively teach writing to elementary students. In a qualitative

study conducted by Valeria (2012), an extensive and ongoing writing project analyzed teachers' perceptions on writing strategies and effectiveness. Teachers also learned more about themselves as writers and they determined strengths that will carry over into instruction. The process of self-discovery allowed teachers to be more effective when facilitating writing instruction.

Another method that is beneficial for teachers when attempting to identify strengths in instruction is the practice of reflection. Ell, Hill, and Grudnoff (2012) examined two cohorts of teaching candidates in a graduate studies program that focused on evidences of teaching and learning through student work analysis. Teacher candidates were given student writing samples to assess. The researchers then compared the teacher candidate scores with that of a nationally implemented writing benchmark rubric instilled by the Ministry of Education (2007) in Auckland, New Zealand. The rubric served as an example of what knowledgeable teachers would note about writing and it could be used to compare to the teacher candidates' responses and their ability to recognize key writing strategies (Ell et al., 2012). Teacher candidate responses to the assignment were coded using themes by the Ministry of Education and included domains of writing such as ideas, organization, style, and conventions. Results from this study indicated that half of the teacher candidates recognized key features outlined by expert teachers when assessing writing. The researchers demonstrated a need for teacher candidates to have a greater skill set of writing strategies in order to successfully teach students how to write in the classroom. The researchers concluded that by using engaging course content and providing opportunities for candidates to apply and share knowledge through collaboration, learning will enhance in university classroom settings.

Teachers' beliefs about writing instruction are often shaped by their experiences as writers. Personal writing experiences, depending upon their nature, may give teachers confidence

or a lack thereof when teaching writing strategies to students. Donk (2004) examined the experiences of pre-service teachers to determine what they already knew about writing and identify, if any, gaps between new state writing expectations and current teacher ability. Findings revealed that many pre-service teachers knew about writing what they were taught as a student themselves in K-12. It was determined that pre-service teachers did not have many first- hand experiences with writing pedagogy or observations of writing instruction (Donk, 2004). Teachers in the study lacked the confidence needed to be independent facilitators of writing in the classroom. Consequently, teachers must have the confidence and tools needed to deliver writing instruction to successfully engage students and enhance their writing abilities.

It is uncommon for teachers to research their own practices unless prompted to do so. For example, low socio-economic schools in urban areas of New Zealand drew educators' attention with the consistent decline of student achievement levels in writing. The conceptual framework of a study of these schools was combined with two theoretical frameworks. These frameworks included teacher inquiry on the best practices of teacher knowledge and training as well as using writing as an effective form of communication (Limbrick et al., 2010). Six schools were purposefully chosen and agreed to participate in the study where one teacher from each school in grades 4-8 carried out the inquiry research within their own classroom. Professional learning circles and the experiences shared there by participating teachers and literacy leaders enabled teachers to reflect on data and personal teaching practices while taking into account student outcomes and research of literature. The teachers in the study reflected on how valuable training through professional development courses, collaboration with fellow writing teachers, and reflection on personal practice were essential in attaining student success in writing. According to Limbrick et al. (2010), this study revealed a need for professional development training in pre-

service and in-service teacher education programs in order for teachers to understand the impact of their practice on student achievement.

In conclusion, writing instruction has quickly evolved using more complex and integrated strategies to increase rigor in all content areas at the elementary level. The CCSS have redefined writing instruction to be more of an experience for students that allows them to learn strategies more appropriate to real-world scenarios. The anchor standards of the CCSS for literacy need to be fully understood by in-service teachers and taught in great detail to pre-service teachers in order for them to provide effective writing instruction in the classroom. Providing best practices along with these anchor standards will contribute to student achievement and the growth of educators' knowledge and skills. Effective teacher training should be consistent and pervasive so that teachers are able to refine skills, stay current with classroom pedagogies, and reflect on strengths and weaknesses that will drive classroom instruction.

Implications

From the anecdotal records of informal conversations about the CCSS for writing instruction, I anticipated that teachers in the study would be concerned about the shift from little to no emphasis on writing from the NCLB education initiative to instructing students to write at least 50% of the school day. In order for students to be successful with writing at least half of the school day, teachers must be able to provide instruction in the content areas that will integrate writing with the lessons delivered. Anecdotal notes reflected that teachers find teaching writing across the curriculum as somewhat of a challenge. I also anticipated that teachers would share concerns about their knowledge and training of effective writing strategies that support the rigorous writing expectations of the CCSS. Due to such a need for training in writing instruction found in research prior to data collection along with anticipated data findings through interviews,

the project genre includes a professional development for teachers. The professional development project includes a literature review on professional development techniques including a focus on writing strategies and teacher strategies to enhance classroom instruction. Additionally, the professional development project includes modeling of writing strategies using a culmination of research from peer-reviewed and scholarly sources.

Summary

Writing instruction and student achievement in writing continues to be a concern at both the national and local school levels. With new state assessments that require more rigor and the integration of writing in all content areas, teachers are lacking adequate knowledge and training necessary to carry out effective writing instruction. In addition, teachers lack the training necessary to provide effective writing instruction and the skills needed to create assessments that align with the common core standards. Best practices in writing instruction have been thoroughly reviewed in the literature to gain a deeper understanding of what effective writing instruction might look like in the classroom. Extensive research has been conducted to learn more about the expectations of the CCSS as well. Research on teacher preparation programs and writing instruction gave a broad perspective on the knowledge and training teachers have endured to this point in the field of education. This phenomenological study further examined teachers' lived experiences in their training of writing instruction, best practices, and possible concerns they face with providing effective writing instruction. An analysis of the data, findings, suggestions, and implications are discussed in the following sections.

Section 2: The Methodology

The lack of training in writing instruction and understanding of writing standards affects the local school where I teach and also impacts the workplace: Businesses spend an enormous amount of time and money to train their employees to write better (Eatherington, 2015). Teachers at the local school were concerned about their instructional practices in teaching writing. To examine the problem of understanding CCSS and learning best practices of writing instruction, a phenomenological design was used to collect and analyze the data. The scope of the problem in this study was described in-depth through the literature review in section one.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand elementary teachers' lived experiences with writing instruction, their use of effective instructional strategies in writing instruction and their ability to motivate students to become successful writers. The purpose of this section was to describe in detail the design of the study and how participants were selected, present data and findings from both individual and focus group interviews, and interpret findings using triangulated data analysis. Findings were presented using textural and structural descriptions. In this section, the following topics are covered: qualitative approach and design, participants, data collection, data analysis, limitations, and conclusion.

Qualitative Approach and Design

Three qualitative designs were reviewed and considered in attempt to design this study: ethnography, case study, and phenomenology. Ethnography is where the researcher is immersed in a culture and becomes a participant observer (Merriam, 2009). The researcher uses observational notes, interviews, documents, artifacts, and personal feelings to analyze culture. An ethnography study design would not be appropriate to use in carrying out the study as the goal is not to examine culture and relationships. Case studies are also common research designs

for qualitative studies. A case study often focuses on the activities of a group of individuals instead of identifying shared patterns and beliefs based on lived experiences of the entire group (Creswell, 2012). It can sometimes be confused with phenomenology because both seek deeper understanding of a particular topic and lend themselves to descriptive reports of findings (Creswell, 2012).

A phenomenological study calls for the researcher to collect information from participants using various types of detailed interviews (Moustakas, 1994). The use of interviews with six individual teachers and a focus group session comprised of six additional teachers provided data to be analyzed on the lived experiences of these teachers with writing instruction. A phenomenological design was logical for this study because it allowed me to capture the lived experiences of participants directly associated with the problem and to see how the problem affects student achievement in writing at the local school. Additionally, a phenomenological design focused on shared experiences and it was supportive of the research questions that drove this study.

In this research study, the phenomenological design was used to collect data from classroom teachers who had experience teaching writing in grades 3-5 and how their lack of knowledge, training, and experiences impacted their ability to increase student achievement using the CCSS writing standards. A qualitative phenomenological study was used with the intent of examining the lived experiences of 12 writing teachers to discover what knowledge and training they had acquired that could be applied to the instructional expectations of the CCSS writing standards and the professional development they thought was necessary to provide them with the knowledge and skills for full implementation that will support student achievement.

Results from the study were shared with administrators and teachers at the local school as well as the language arts department of the local school system to inform educators of ways to support teachers with effective writing instruction. Teaching is an intense profession, particularly for elementary teachers, who teach all subject areas. With the CCSS expectations for writing instruction and increasing the amount of time students are to write each day, the experiences of the teachers was a focus of this study.

Research Questions

The following research questions were used to collect data through individual and focus group interviews at the researcher's local school:

1. How do teachers perceive the impact of the CCSS writing standards on their current writing instructional practices?
2. What do participants feel they need in order to be effective teachers of writing with the CCSS standards expectations?

Participants

When conducting a phenomenological study, the researcher collects data from participants using in-depth individual interviews and multiple interviews such as focus groups (Moustakas, 1994). There were a total of 12 participants invited to participate in this study. A phenomenological study has a suggested number of participants ranging from 5 to 25 persons with experience within the inclusive classroom setting (Polkinghorne, 1989). Six teachers in grades 3-5 participated in a focus group interview. Two teachers each from grades 3-5 were interviewed together in the focus group. An additional two teachers per grade level in grades 3-5 were selected to participate in individual interviews.

Selecting Participants

The participants in this study were chosen using purposeful sampling and consisted of 12 teachers from grades 3-5 at the local school. Through purposeful sampling, I was able to select the participants and specific location for the study to better understand the research problem (Creswell, 2012). In order to examine the lived experiences of the participants, I conducted six individual interviews with two classroom teachers from third grade, two teachers from the fourth grade, and two teachers from fifth grade. All six teachers were responsible for planning and delivering writing instruction to students who have a variety of learning needs in their classrooms. One of the two interviewees from each grade level was a novice teacher, having 5 or less years of classroom experience. The other participant of each grade level was a veteran teacher who had six or more years of classroom experience. Purposefully selecting one novice and one veteran teacher from each grade level allowed me to compare and contrast the knowledge and training of these teachers ascertained from their college coursework along with the professional development acquired through the local system and how both have impacted their instruction with using effective writing instructional practices and student achievement.

In addition to six individual interviews, I facilitated a focus group session comprised of six additional classroom teachers who were not involved in the individual interview process. When considering participants for the focus group session, purposeful criterion sampling was utilized to gather additional data in a group discussion setting. Lodico et al. (2010) described purposeful sampling as a process where the researcher identifies necessary individuals who possess specific knowledge on the relevant topic. The 12 teachers experienced different levels of training of effective writing instruction at the college level and through professional development beyond college. Two teachers from fifth grade, who have direct relationships with me,

participated in the study. Two teachers from third grade and two teachers from fourth grade were acquaintances of mine. The roles of the participants did not directly affect data collection as all interview questions were open-ended and promoted honest and free responses. Established prior relationships with participants promoted trust in conversation and validity of responses. Participants were aware that I have background knowledge and personal experience pertaining to the nature of the study.

Role of the Researcher

I am currently in my fifth year as a fifth grade teacher at the research site where I serve as a grade level representative for the school leadership team and collaborate with teachers from all grade levels. Before conducting research with the participants in this study, I received approval from the principal at the local school. It is the policy of the Board of Education that before research can be conducted at a local school that includes school employees, the principal of the school must first approve the data collection procedures. The local school principal was made aware of the research study and data collection process, and she was supportive of the research data collection procedures. She was interested in the final data of this study and how the information could be instrumental in guiding future staff development that would provide teachers with effective writing practices to support writing instruction and full implementation of the CCSS writing standards to improve student achievement. I facilitated the focus group session, and I remained neutral in order to alleviate any bias in the data collection process. Additionally, I served as the interviewer for the six individual interviews.

Even though I currently teach writing in fifth grade and I experience similar challenges mentioned in the research regarding writing instruction and CCSS mandates, biases were avoided. I am knowledgeable of CCSS and I have experience with teacher preparation courses;

however, this knowledge and experience remained separate from the study and was not be shared during interviews to prevent any bias from surfacing. Participants were aware of the knowledge I have and they may attempt to answer interview questions in a way that is pleasing to me. Questions were asked in a way that led to open-ended responses that minimized any bias the participants may have felt when responding and discussing topics.

Ethical Protection of Participants

Before moving forward with the individual interviews and the focus session, I submitted a formal request to the International Review Board (IRB) for approval. This was a requirement of the research for assurance that the research project study was low risk for participants. The IRB review of the proposed data collection process minimized risks, ensured voluntary, informed participation, and protected confidentiality.

Once the IRB approval was granted (No. 10-24-14-0298020), I contacted each participant and explained to each participant the purpose of the study and requested his or her participation in the study. Participants purposefully selected for individual interviews received a formal consent form (Appendix D) that included the confidentiality of their identities as well as the identity of the local school and school system. Participants were reminded that their involvement in the study as interviewees or focus group members was voluntary. The letter informed participants that by signing the participant consent form, they understood their participation was strictly voluntary, the information collected was confidential and protected by me, and contact information was included in the event they had questions about the data collection process. Participants selected for the focus group interview received a similar consent form with an alternate disclosure of confidentiality given the nature of a group interview setting (Appendix E).

Participants in this study were at my local school which made them accessible at a variety of times. The third and fourth grade teachers do not collaborate with me. Because I am a staff member at the local school and I have a positive working relationship with staff members, participants spoke openly about their lived experiences with effective writing practices and the impact their experiences have on student achievement.

Data Collection

When a phenomenological study is conducted, data are collected from the participants in the form of interviews where the researcher asks open-ended questions to participants and records their answers (Creswell, 2012). Interview questions were developed to elicit textural and structural descriptions of participants' experiences throughout data collection. Textural descriptions consisted of significant key points and common themes identified from interview transcripts, and structural descriptions will consist of the conditions in which participants experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). According to Lodico et al. (2010), many qualitative interviews are conducted one-on-one when the interviewer is attempting to discover the participant's analysis, feelings, and reactions to the experience. Interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes. The individual interviews provided participants the opportunity to share lived experiences of how they acquired effective writing methods and strategies along with planning and delivering effective writing instruction. The questions were open-ended to allow participants to elaborate on their lived experiences of teaching writing (Appendix B). The individual interviews were held during each participant's planning period for convenience. The interviews were conducted in the individual teacher's classroom. Students were not in the classroom during participants' planning periods so privacy helped to make the conversation more open for participants. The information collected from the individual interviews and the focus

group session provided a deeper insight and different perspectives on the questions posed for this study.

I used a clipboard that contained the interview guide to assist me with note-taking. The same note-taking process was used when facilitating the focus group session using the focus group guide (Appendix C). Both individual interviews and the focus group session included the use of a digital recorder to record interview and focus group conversation.

Interview questions were created based on informal conversations with teachers and through a pilot interview. Creswell (2012) suggested that a pilot interview be conducted prior to finalizing any interview guide in order to solidify questions and promote fluid conversation. A pilot interview took place with a fifth grade teacher who had been teaching fifth grade for 6 years. I used the individual interview guide (Appendix B) to determine whether or not the questions yielded appropriate conversation to sufficiently address my research questions. Questions 3, Question 4, and Question 7 in each interview guide yielded yes or no answers. The teacher participant suggested that I revise these questions where each question yielded a more open-ended response. I revised these based on the suggestion of the teacher participant to yield open-ended responses (see Appendices B and F). The interview lasted approximately 45 minutes in the participant's classroom. The time allotted for the individual interviews was confirmed by the pilot interview. The participant responded with honest answers, and she stated that the interview questions were very practical and pertinent to upper grades, 3-5. Suggestions for future research in many studies also assisted me with the design of the interview questions. Common themes that surfaced from the interviews were considered for further research and used to guide the development of a doctoral project.

In addition to individual interviews, I conducted a focus group session that consisted of six different teacher participants from grades 3-5 who were not involved in the individual interviews (Appendix C). A focus group is a select number of participants gathered at a scheduled time and location to conduct a congenial conversation on a particular topic or phenomenon (Kitzinger, 1994). Focus groups can be beneficial in examining lived experiences of participants by collecting data more quickly because the researcher is planning an interview session of multiple participants versus one interviewee. With the open discussion that transpired between multiple participants, individuals were able to use the ideas shared by others to bring out responses that contributed to a much richer discussion resulting in meaningful data. The main disadvantage of using the focus group method was the time constraints associated with the session and the amount of time participants were willing to commit to the study. The number of participants and the number of open ended questions used in a focus group session must be considered when determining the length of the session. The voice of each participant needs to be heard in order to capture the lived experience of everyone, so the amount of time allowed for each question response must be taken into consideration when setting up the focus group session (Creswell, 2012). Participants were given adequate time to answer and explain their thoughts. In a phenomenological study conducted by researchers in the mental health field, the use of focus group sessions was examined opposed to their typical practice of using individual interviews only concluding that focus group sessions may provide meaningful data to provide a greater understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Palmer, Larkin, De Visser, & Fadden, 2010). Therefore, the use of a focus group session in addition to individual interviews was successful in providing data that gave a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being examined in this study.

The participants were comprised of two teachers from each grade level in grades 3-5 with varied teaching experiences. The expected duration of the focus group session was approximately one hour. There are no steadfast rules about the number of participants to have in a focus group, but the general consensus lies between six and ten participants (Merriam, 2009). In order to monitor the focus group discussions and honor the time of the participants, each of the seven questions were given approximately seven to eight minutes for participants to respond to sharing their lived experiences as requested in the questions. By monitoring the time for the introduction, question responses, and a couple of minutes for ending remarks, the focus group session was conducted well within the hour timeframe. A digital recorder was used to capture the conversations. In addition, I took notes on the focus group questions guide to document notes from the discussions as well. Additional data collected from these participants assisted with examining a more detailed understanding of the lived experiences that teachers face when attempting to utilize effective writing instructional practices in the classroom. Focus group interviews enable the researcher to gather data from more than one participant and to observe the manner in which the participants interact along with the group dynamics (Lodico et al., 2010). A group discussion can be instrumental in generating open conversations that provide additional data which exposes the lived experiences of participants (Creswell, 2012). A specific limitation when conducting focus group interviews in a phenomenological study is the difficulty to determine how many stakeholders are ultimately affected by the study. Interpreting multiple perspectives of the participants through focus group interviews has validated data collection and warranted for future topics of research.

Questions used to lead the session are found in the focus group guide (Appendix C). Participants were invited to share their lived experiences with gaining knowledge and training of

effective writing practices and how their current instruction is being impacted by the rigorous expectations of the new CCSS writing standards. The focus group session transpired in the conference room after school, as this location could be reserved in advance and allowed for privacy in an environment where teachers could speak openly about their experiences. In order to properly set the stage of the interview as well as the focus group session, participants were informed of the purpose of the study, clarification of any questions, and were asked to keep comments relevant to the questions at hand (Creswell, 2012). Questions were asked one at a time, allowing for adequate response time. Probing was necessary for participants who were silent. Documented notes from the interviews and focus group session were transcribed through a professional service and transcripts were compared to written notes to confirm accuracy of the data.

The use of interviews, both individually and in a focus group setting, provided participants with an opportunity to reflect upon their lived experiences as teachers of writing in the elementary classroom. The questions were constructed to guide the thoughts and beliefs of participants and how they feel the knowledge and training of best practices they possess support the rigorous expectations of the CCSS writing standards. Participants were also invited to share their beliefs on the methods and strategies they felt are needed in order to implement the CCSS writing standards effectively.

The data collection process could have created a sense of insecurity of participants as they were asked to reveal practices that may not be considered best practices causing them to be fearful of ridicule by the researcher or by other participants in the focus group session. Given the circumstance that I am a classroom teacher on staff, participants may have been inclined to respond in a manner they felt was acceptable versus honest. It was necessary for the researcher to

remain neutral to avoid exhibiting any bias when conducting individual interviews as well as when facilitating the focus group session.

Data Analysis

Phenomenological data were collected through interviews and then analyzed using qualitative methods. Data analysis is a process that comprises the dissection of data and abstract concepts through inductive and deductive reasoning (Merriam, 2009). In analyzing the data, I was able to determine if the guiding research questions were addressed adequately. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed using a professional service. I then color-coded coded the data in order to identify common themes. When color coding, I highlighted quotes and comments from the participants that tell how they experienced the phenomenon of current writing practices acquired through college preparation coursework, professional development, and classroom experiences along with how they felt the CCSS writing standards have impacted their writing instruction (Moustakas, 1994). Themes were labeled based on emergent ideas that surfaced multiple times and were identified throughout the review process of the interview transcription. Interview guides and notes were present to aid in the identification of codes as well. Specific labels used to identify concepts, themes, and events were identified as a code, and the overall relationship between all were identified as a code structure (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). A description of the participants' experiences was derived from the comments and themes resulting in a textural description. In addition, a structural description was developed using the comments and themes to convey the circumstances and settings in which the experiences transpired.

The data were displayed in the form of textural descriptions as recommended by Moustakas (1994) in order to provide myself with an understanding of how the phenomenon was

experienced. In addition, the use of textural descriptions provided an extended perspective on all angles and views of the lived experiences of participants in the study. The end result was a compilation of the textural and structural descriptions of the data with a written composite description to assist with a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The transcripts were read numerous times in order to verify that I synthesized the data as accurately as possible and justified the conclusions.

These themes were used to analyze data and to identify where writing instruction needs were most prominent and why. According to Creswell (2012), to assess the accuracy of their research, qualitative researchers apply validation procedures such as member checking, triangulation, and auditing. Member checking, or respondent validation, helps to assure that the researcher has successfully captured the perceptions of the participants (Merriam, 2009). Participants were allowed to review the transcripts of their interview or focus group session to check for validity of responses. Participants were also allowed to make any necessary edits at that time.

Triangulation of data further contributed to the validity and reliability of this qualitative study. Merriam (2009) defined triangulation as using multiple participants, data sources, and methods of data collection to confirm findings that emerged in the data. The collected data provided a diversified set of shared experiences that promoted a collection of themes. Themes were identified based on commonalities between stakeholders in both individual and focus group interviews. Figure 1 depicts the triangulation of data between individual interviews, focus group interviews, and interview notes.

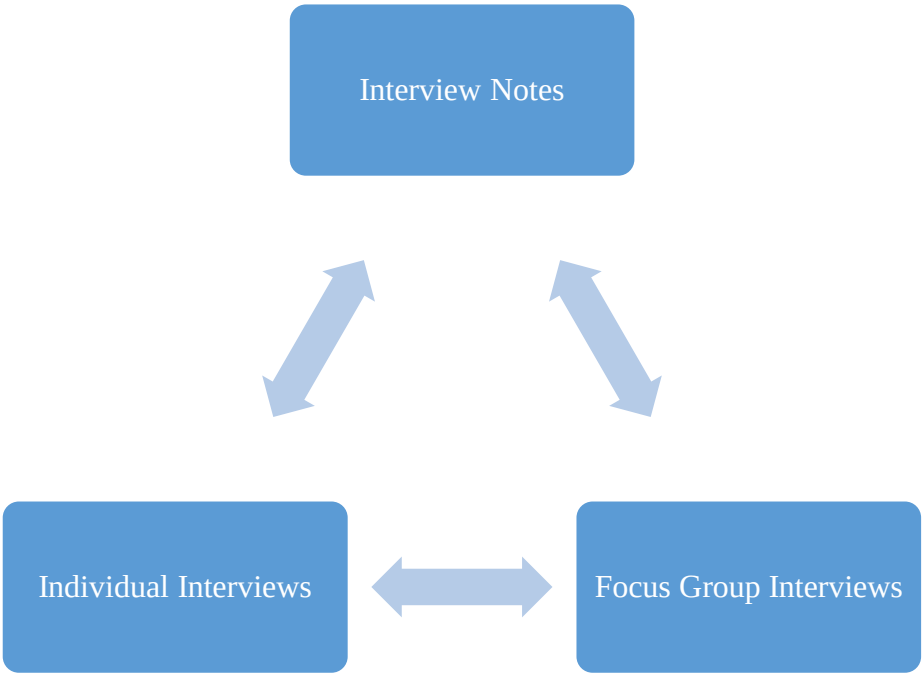

Figure 1. Data triangulation.

Limitations

No discrepant cases were noted. Limitations that were evident, such as unanswered questions by participants or issues in sampling, suggested implications for further research (Creswell, 2012). I noted implications regarding future research in the implications section of this research project.

Data Analysis

Data collected from individual interview participants, as well as focus group interview participants, were transcribed and analyzed to determine if results related to the research problem and whether or not interview discussions answered the proposed research questions. Through the analysis of data, I determined that participants shared beliefs and challenges on effectively implementing common core writing instruction, and I perceived that additional professional development was needed in order to improve upon their practice of teaching writing.

Digital recordings were first submitted to be transcribed by a professional transcription service. Using the horizonalizing procedure of phenomenal analysis (Moustakas, 1994), all data were considered as being meaningful and equal in value. Meaning units, or responses which occurred in repetition, were clustered into more common themes to prevent the repetition of reported findings (Moustakas, 1994). An appropriate four-step analysis was recommended by Moustakas (1994) when analyzing phenomenological data. These four steps were used when analyzing transcribed data within the study. First, transcriptions were analyzed multiple times along with my personal interview notes to ensure that all data were considered. Next, non-repetitive interview responses that addressed the research questions were highlighted. Then, these statements were clustered into common themes. The color-coding method was used once again to expand codes to broader themes (Creswell, 2012). Themes were then cross checked to confirm findings. Finally, notes were taken to generate a textural-structural outline to be explained in the formal results summary (Moustakas, 1994).

The individual and focus group responses revealed four main themes that directly related to the research problem. These themes included the need for training in writing instruction in pre-service teacher programs, the impact of common core standards on current writing instruction, lack of professional development at the local school, and challenges with differentiated writing instruction. Each theme was explained thoroughly in the textural description that follows. Structural descriptions were also provided to describe settings and circumstances in which experiences of participants occurred.

Textural and Structural Descriptions of Individual Themes

Transcripts of the individual interview sessions were analyzed, and the participants were categorized by the number of years taught in order to compare experiences of novice teachers

with 1-3 years of experience to veteran teachers with 5 or more years of experience. The common threads that surfaced among the individual participants were knowledge of effective writing strategies acquired from teacher preparation programs, understanding the impact of CCSS writing standards on current writing instruction, knowledge and training of research-based effective writing strategies procured through post undergraduate training, and the need for professional development in effective writing instruction. There were three novice teacher participants. These participants responded that they had no knowledge of effective writing strategies as a result of their teacher education preparation program. The responses of the other three veteran participants of the individual interviews revealed that one had no knowledge of effective writing strategies with the other two participants having limited understanding.

In addition, all six candidates conveyed that their understanding of how the CCSS writing standards impacted their current instruction was unclear. Furthermore, two novice teachers and all three veteran teachers reported possessing limited knowledge and training of research-based effective writing strategies while one novice teacher had no knowledge and training with research-based effective writing strategies. Participants expressed the need for professional development to aid in the process of deconstructing CCSS writing standards in order to gain a deeper understanding of what participants are to teach and what students are expected to know and be able to do. The acquisition of effective research-based strategies in writing to support the rigor of the CCSS requirements was also a need mentioned by a majority of participants.

Training in effective writing instruction. The first major theme that emerged was the lack of training in writing preparation courses at the college level in research-based instructional strategies. Participants shared that little to no instruction was provided in how to teach writing to utilize research-based strategies in writing in order to be an effective writing teacher. In each

individual interview, participants shared their experiences in college training programs with writing instruction, and they also shared how common core had shaped new beliefs and created challenges for implementing effective writing instruction as they were missing key strategies for instruction. Participant A had an undergraduate and master's degree in early childhood education. Her knowledge of best practices in writing was limited to her master's thesis, which focused on research-based writing strategies using technology. The college courses she took did not address teaching writing. Participant A stated:

> When I was in college, writing was not as important as it is now. I know that my college professors did not put as much emphasis on teaching writing as they did math and science at the time. I wish that there had been more focus on writing, because now I feel like I have to play catch-up when I'm teaching my kids writing. I feel like I have to stay one step ahead of them to make sure that I'm doing it correctly. That's why when we do staff developments and that kind of thing, I usually try and pay as close attention as possible, because that's where I feel like I need the most help in teaching.

It was interesting to see this common theme throughout all of the individual interviews because the teachers all had various backgrounds and levels of experience. Participants received little to no training in writing and often referenced how they now feel less equipped in their own classroom. Participant B said, "To be honest, I don't feel like I was prepared fully to teach writing." Participant C shared, "At my school, my teacher taught us how to instruct our students using the 6+1 Traits. I think that was my main writing class. I don't remember any others." Participant D and F had a basis of training in college education courses. Even with training, Participant F stated:

> The coursework that I had in college I don't think prepared me to teach writing. I was prepared more for the management of the writing. How to sort of set up the writing workshop, and how to have music playing to encourage the students to think and to relax while they write. But nothing really comes to mind that specifically taught the characteristics of writing, or what to look for.

Any description of the characteristics of writing, or specific strategies and skills, were absent throughout interview responses and participants' experiences. Participant D learned about writer's workshop, the structure of effective writing lessons, and was able to learn how to appreciate the authenticity of writing through experiences but did not go in depth on how to implement actual lessons and strategies. Participant D shared:

> In terms of writing instruction, we learned about the model of the mini-lesson, and the shared writing, and then the guided writing, then the independent writing and the big framework of it. But, really never got further than that. Not really how to implement, not really how to assess. We would we were taken and given some writing experiences doing a writer's workshop outside and a sensory thing, but never explicitly going through the process, and how to assess fairly.

Whether a participant was a novice or veteran teacher, the data revealed that teacher education programs have not changed significantly and the need for training in writing instruction is still present.

The impact of CCSS on writing instruction. A second theme that emerged from the data analysis was the impact of common core standards on current writing instruction. Many participants expressed concern for time to cover all standards as well as not being equipped with effective strategies when teaching the common core writing standards. Common core standards

include the expectations that all writing genres are taught while integrating all major content areas (CCSSI, 2014). Participant A shared how she must be proactive and reflect on writing lessons each day to ensure that she is effectively implementing new writing strategies and addressing common core standards properly. She wished the common core standards were around when she was going through grade school and worries about students who have not been exposed to the standards starting in kindergarten. Participant A stated, "I am concerned these students will have a gap in their learning for quite some time. Teachers must incorporate appropriate writing strategies to close such gaps." Participant A also shared that in order to close students' gaps in writing, "I think the best way to do it is to make sure they write all day long in every subject."

For two of the first year participants, B and C, common core standards served as a detailed guide on what to teach and how in depth a writing concept should be taught. Participant D, a fifth grade teacher, shared the following about how she felt common core standards have impacted her writing instruction:

> I feel like, because fifth grade has always had a very strong emphasis on writing, the common core standards coming in that were writing-focused did not scare us, did not really change our writing instruction in a big picture. I would say, I've really seen benefits of the kids doing more research and then writing based on that research, and more from, using evidence. So, I think that's probably the biggest positive effect.

This school year was the first year in Georgia and at the elementary level for Participant E. Common core standards are altogether new for her and she shared that she has yet to see an impact on her instruction. Participant F taught a collaborative fifth grade class and shared the following concerns in regards to common core writing standards:

> I think that sometimes my kids just aren't ready. I teach the collaborative class, so I have a cluster of the special education kids in my classroom, and I know that a lot of times we're struggling to form sentences, and we're struggling to work on just basic conventions. So, taking them from where they are to what common core says they need to be doing can sometimes be quite a big jump.

Although it was evident that participants felt common core standards have a positive impact on writing instruction, there was a consensus that the standards caused additional challenges when teaching writing.

Effective writing instruction through local professional development. The lack of professional development to support effective writing instruction at the local school was a third theme that surfaced after analyzing interview data. Participants shared experiences of professional development including writing workshops, local school training on the 6 + 1 Trait Writing program, and a balanced literacy framework. Teachers shared that they meet once a month as an entire staff for one hour to receive professional development on literacy strategies mandated by the district. Topics are centered on literacy but often include more reading-based strategies than writing. Additionally, teachers meet two times each week during a 45 minute planning to collaborative with their grade level team. During this time, teachers discuss common core standards and how they should drive instruction and assessment. Each grade level is at a different level of maturity in their collaborative efforts and knowledge base of standards. Participants were very open about their experience with professional development and collaboration.

Participant A did not share data regarding professional development, but did say that she worked closely with the school’s literacy coach to embed research-based strategies in her

classroom writing instruction. Participant B shared that as a first year teacher, he did more listening and does not feel equipped enough to contribute to conversations about writing. He said more time is needed to practice strategies shared at professional development sessions. Participant C said she felt that, "more guidance and follow through is needed after professional developments" and "right now, what's guiding me, is the standards and county lesson plans to formulate my lessons." Participant D, a veteran teacher with 5 years of experience at the same school, expressed her wish to see professional development differentiated for teachers. She stated:

> We do a staff development monthly, and I would say that would be the main one. It really has helped when it transitioned to differentiated, where it wasn't all K-5, when it was focused on the specific area. Then I think, another opportunity is we do have all these different online modules that we can sign up for.

Online modules mentioned in Participant D's response included professional development opportunities offered by the school district throughout the year. Although many opportunities were on research-based strategies in literacy, reading still remained the focus. New teachers to the district were often times unaware of these opportunities as well. Local school professional development is typically required and provides teachers with more job-embedded training. Participant E, a veteran teacher but new to the elementary level, along with Participant F, shared the desire to have more professional development that was tailored to specific grade levels. Both felt as if this would maximize their time and give them more research-based strategies to take directly back to their classrooms. It is interesting that many of the professional developments experienced by the participants have not been differentiated or specific to their individual needs or needs of the grade level.

Differentiated instruction in writing. The fourth major theme that emerged from the data analysis was the need for differentiated writing instruction. Just as participants shared they would like for professional development to be differentiated based on their needs, they felt as if writing instruction should be differentiated based on students' needs. Participant D shared a plethora of thoughts and concerns regarding the implementation of common core standards and how they have affected her instruction thus far. When comparing common core standards to prior state standards, she said:

> I think a lot of it is just people not knowing exactly what the expectations are, and you know, prior in our county, whenever we had new standards, we were given many, many examples of what a student at each level looks like. Expectations were much clearer.

Currently, student examples and expectations at each stage of writing are unclear and make it difficult for teachers to differentiate classroom instruction. Participant A admitted that she sometimes visits past teachers of students in her class in order to gain a better understanding of who they are as writers and what strategies worked best to enhance the students' writing performance. With proper differentiation strategies, teachers would be able to adapt writing instruction to meet the needs of each individual student. Participant B found integrating additional content areas into writing instruction to be most beneficial in maximizing instruction time and engaging students. Although he admitted he did not know much about differentiation, he tried to accommodate to students' needs by conferring with students one-on-one and in small groups and recorded a running record of current student performance. Participant C also mentioned integration of grammar and writing lessons as a strategy that allows her to differentiate lessons and small groups more effectively. She shared that she has struggled this

year with how to serve her ELLs as well as special education students since they do not always understand concepts the first time they are taught.

All participants had received ongoing training this year at the local school on analyzing standards and determining learning targets for each standard. The process takes place during collaborative planning twice a week for one hour. Participant E had been actively participating in analyzing the standards but is concerned that this process has not included discussion on how standards are to be differentiated. She also shared the following on analyzing standards:

> It's more just discussing maybe what the standard is asking. I wouldn't say it's looking at, "Well, here is some of my kids' writing, here is some of my kids' writing," which I have done in previous schools where we've pulled writing together and compared across different teachers and different levels. What is it looking like? That's not anything we've ever done here.

Examining student writing collaboratively can open a window to rich discussion of writing strategies, student concerns, and reflection of implemented instruction. Another component of differentiating writing instruction that surfaced in the interviews was shared by Participant F:

> So, conferencing is one of the biggest things, and just the basic structure of my writer's workshop. We follow the basic one where we do a mini lesson, and then they have a chance to develop those new ideas at their seats, and then we'll conference with them, and then eventually take those ideas and move them into a full writing piece. But with those conferences, it gives me that one-on-one chance to let them know what they're doing right, what we need to maybe work on a little bit. It also lets me check in to see if I need to re-teach something, or if the majority of my kids really have it.

Conferring with students allows a teacher to be aware of strengths and weaknesses of each student (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001). Conversation during a conference is intimate and focused on the student while the teacher recommends differentiated strategies to meet the student's individual needs.

Textural and Structural Descriptions of Focus Group Themes

Transcripts of the focus group interview session were analyzed, and the participants were categorized by the number of years taught in order to compare experiences of novice teachers to veteran teachers. The common threads that surfaced among the participants were knowledge of effective writing strategies acquired from teacher preparation programs, understanding the impact of CCSS writing standards on current writing instruction, knowledge and training of research-based effective writing strategies procured through post undergraduate training, and the need for professional development in effective writing instruction.

There were six total participants with three novice teachers and three veteran teachers. The novice teachers responded that they had no knowledge of effective writing strategies as a result of their teacher education preparation program. The responses of the other three veteran participants of the focus group revealed that one had no knowledge of effective writing strategies with the other two having limited understanding.

Furthermore, five out of six participants conveyed that their understanding of how the CCSS writing standards impacted their current instruction was unclear with one veteran participant possessing basic knowledge of the writing standards. Additionally, two novice teachers and all three veteran teachers reported possessing limited knowledge and training of research-based effective writing strategies while one novice teacher had no knowledge and training of research-based effective writing strategies. The need for professional development to

deconstruct the CCSS writing standards in order to gain a deeper understanding of what participants are to teach along with the acquisition of effective research-based strategies to support the rigor of the CCSS requirements was greatly expressed by all six participants. The same four themes that emerged from individual interviews were also evident in the data analysis of the focus group interviews.

Training in effective writing instruction. The first theme that surfaced in the focus group interview was the lack of training in writing instruction both in pre-service programs and as classroom teachers. Participants A, B, D, and F admitted to having no college training in writing instruction whatsoever. Participant B completed an undergraduate program at a local college in the county, and his only account of writing training and understanding of the traits is explained in the following excerpt:

> We dissected the book and we kind of talked about it. We didn't use it as much as we talked about it. So, but we talked about it and we had [literature] circles in our groups about the chapters that we were discussing. But that's about as much as we did with it.

Participant D discussed the new strategy of analyzing standards and how this was not taught in college courses. He said he has struggled with seeing standards and trying to understand the depth to which to teach writing standards. Participant E, grade level leader for fourth grade, shared the challenges of attempting to lead the teachers on her grade level in analyzing the common core writing standards and the importance of implementing the standards in the classroom during their weekly collaborative planning sessions:

> You have to assist them [grade level members] with their expectations [of implementing the CCSS writing standards] because the expectation in one classroom is not the expectation in another classroom. So, that's the value of taking the time collaboratively to

> break down what you're supposed to be teaching. But when we don't do it, then there's not equity from one classroom to the next. That's unfair to our students. It's not fair to us as educators, to be honest with you. I've left frustrated many days, but like, it's needed. It's definitely needed, but one of the challenges is, do you know what you're teaching? Do I know what I'm supposed to be teaching?

Due to the lack of training in writing in pre-service programs shared in the focus group interviews, many teachers were in a quandary of wondering what they were supposed to teach. The impact of common core standards on current writing instruction was a concern amongst all of the individual interview and focus group participants. All participants agreed that the greatest confusion when implementing common core standards was the expectations embedded within each writing standard. Participants disclosed that within this struggle, they must get to know their students as individual writers to understand what standards must be retaught, expanded upon, and enriched. Participant F shared that common core allows students to focus more on the writing process rather than simply publishing a piece as often as possible. This excerpt from Participant F conveyed specific benefits of implementing the CCSS writing standards and how conferring with students to focus on the process versus just the final product will provide students with the opportunity to be more successful writers:

> I'll say this is about conferring earlier: I think with common core and what they're asking of kids, it really, really stresses conferring with students and making sure that they are able to realize it is okay not to see the big picture. Let's just focus in on something really small. I think when you confer with them, you actually help them to see their small successes, because sometimes what we've done writing for so many years, the success is a finished piece. But when I confer with you, your success is “hey, you did this in the

> piece, period." So with Common Core, they take a more in-depth look at certain things within writing, and they're looking for this, and we're looking for this, and how do you do this? Is this in your writing? I think with the conferring piece, you actually give them the opportunity to be more successful…. I think it's also helped me to focus more in on the writing process, and the importance of the process. I think sometimes before then, it was just the importance of the piece, but now it's a more focused look on the process, which I appreciate.

With common core standards allowing for more room in creativity and depth, teachers can now focus on the quality of writing pieces versus the quantity. In the past, writing was only a focus for grades 3 and 5 due to a state mandated writing assessment required for promotion to the next grade level. Fourth grade teachers did not focus on writing instruction due to the requirement that students had to pass the CRCT in all major content areas. Participant E, a fourth grade teacher, shared frustrations that her grade level team has faced due to the previous CRCT high stakes testing that required their students to pass all content areas of the test with no accountability in writing achievement. Due to the emphasis on the content areas, writing instruction was not a major priority as shared in this excerpt:

> In fourth grade, it's really difficult to, in the past, it has been really difficult to teach writing to the extent and degree that maybe other grades are able to because of the CRCT and having to focus so much on reading, math, science and social studies, and having the students all pass all sections, which is not a requirement for any other grade. So, in the past, writing has kind of been put on the back burner to make sure that we go to all of the content, especially because we have such intense amounts of content in all the areas. (Participant E)

The results of the new Georgia state assessment being administered to students for the first time in the spring of 2015 will produce data on the writing ability of students and re-emphasize the importance of bringing effective writing instruction back to the forefront of all grade level curricula.

Conferring with students also surfaced in the context of this theme as well. The power of conferring with students lies in the knowledge the teacher holds. Participant A added to Participant F's thoughts on common core implementation and said, "The other good thing about conferring is you can meet the different students where they are." Participant F previously shared that with the implementation of the CCSS writing standards comes the expectation of teachers to confer with students. In doing so, teachers provide individual support to students "where they are" with specific standards of writing which in turn helps students understand the process of being a writer and not to focus as much on the final product. Participant D felt as if common core standards have made teachers more pressed for time to cover content since standard expectations are more in depth than ever before. Conferring with students during writing workshop requires a teacher to take time to talk with students individually about their work. Participant A worried that a gap will be evident from one grade level to the next until students who have started kindergarten with common core standards begin to demonstrate growth.

Effective writing instruction through local professional development. Professional development to support effective writing instruction at the local school was a third theme that surfaced from the data analysis. Participants shared stories of ineffective professional development they had experienced due to the lack of engagement, differentiation, implementation, and poor delivery of content. Four of the six participants have participated in a

variety of district level professional development opportunities. Participant A, who has the most years of teaching experience as well as district learning, stated the following in regards to district professional development opportunities: "I mean, it's not like we come back and we really talk about it much from there." Reflection and follow-through are critical to professional development as teachers need to collaborate with peers and share ideas to grow in their own practice. All participants participate in literacy professional development at the local school once a month. When asked if professional development experiences at the local school have motivated teachers to engage students as writers, Participant B said, "For me personally, I can't say that the professional learning experiences has motivated me to do that." Participant C discussed how the lack of professional development training had an impact on his teaching in a previous setting and how similar evidence can be seen at his current school:

> I mean, I can see it in third grade. I taught fourth grade in [another location] where they had America's Choice. Every year, they had a writer's workshop and a reader's workshop. You had to do it. You could see those kids that came up, they at least could write and put a story together, because they had been doing it every grade, and I can tell here, that hasn't been done. Because they come to me, and they can't, some can't put a sentence together. They don't know paragraphs, and I'm having to go back and reteach.

Many participants shared their concern of having to seek out additional resources on their own time to make up for the lack of training in professional developments. A few participants referenced Lucy Calkins and Ralph Fletcher as reliable researchers as well as the 6 + 1 Trait Writing program (Calkins et al., 2012) as their primary knowledge used when teaching and planning for writing. Other participants did not know of any research-based writing strategies or materials. Participants were not provided with a specific writing program by the school system to

use for planning writing instruction, therefore, planning for effective writing instruction is time consuming for teachers and is inconsistent across the school. Participant A stated:

> How we all think, and are we all willing to research on our own, and find out what are we supposed to be doing? There's some very important links right here, and it's called, we don't have time at school to do it all. You have to do part of this outside of work to catch up to know what you're saying.

In addition to planning for effective writing instruction being time consuming, Participant B, a first year teacher, added the challenge of never being taught any instructional strategies and the work involved in doing so. He shared:

> It's also important that, you know, like the way your questions are lined up, all of this comes from somewhere, you know what I mean? So, it's like, if I've not been taught in my own experience to develop my writing in a certain way, man, it's sure [going to] take a lot of work for me to learn how to do it myself and then teach somebody else how to do it. It's one thing to know how to do it, it's another thing to know how to teach someone how to do it effectively.

Time, or lack thereof, seemed to be a common factor within the theme of achieving the knowledge and training necessary to be effective teachers of writing. Participants seemed concerned about the amount of time they had to spend to find writing strategies and create lessons on their own. When professional development opportunities on effective writing instruction are not provided for teachers, collaboration is lost as they must spend time on their own researching strategies. As Participant B explained, being a beginning teacher with no previous training at the teacher preparation college poses a challenge that requires a lot of work. Not only are beginning elementary teachers adapting to the roles and responsibilities of a

classroom teacher for the first time, but they are also attempting to learn their grade level specific curriculum in all subject areas. Without the knowledge and skills of effective teaching strategies in writing as well as other subjects, beginning teachers are at a disadvantage and tend to struggle.

Differentiated writing instruction. The final theme that surfaced from the analysis of data were the need for differentiated writing instruction. The concepts of modeling writing lessons in the workshop setting and conferring with students were recurring throughout the discussion of differentiating writing instruction for students. Participant B shared:

> I'm just [going to] second what she said earlier about conferring. I think just the concept of conferring has an underlining piece of differentiation and development. I think that for me personally, in my classroom, when I have the opportunity to meet with kids and talk to them about what they did, and what they can do, and how they can use this to make it more powerful, or make things better. That's the biggest component of my writing teaching. The other pieces are just these overall general concepts.

Participant E explained how modeling lessons for students has been a powerful component of her lessons. With modeling, expectations are clear to students. Modeling can be done in a variety of ways to differentiate for various types of learners. Participant E also explained why she believes in conferring with students:

> The conferring piece is beautiful, because you can talk to them and oftentimes, there's nobody talking to them about their work, so it's beautiful for them to have a conversation. You make them think, but modeling is great too, and I like to model both sides. Like, I'm having to teach code switching in my room. What you write on your paper is not what you text your friend.

Conferring with students is a vital component of writing workshop. Teachers are able to provide feedback to support students through individual conversations about their progress as they apply writing skills taught during the mini lesson in their own writing. Conferring is an effective form of differentiation as teachers are able to understand specific learning needs of each student in writing.

Participant B also shared his experience as a student teacher in fifth grade last year. He explained that the majority of the focus in writing was preparing for the state writing assessment; this preparation was centered on prompt writing alone. Although prompts focused on genres, little content integration was considered when planning and implementing writing lessons. The importance of content integration also surfaced in individual interviews. Integration topics in science and social studies allow students to write on and in response to real-world events and problems. Participant D said he has struggled this year to differentiate other content areas when integrating standards into writing lessons. He mentioned that more training on differentiation would be beneficial as well.

The impact of common core writing standards on writing instruction, effective writing instruction, and effective teacher training to enhance student achievement in writing were reviewed in depth to determine the impact each has on the nature of this study. All topics proved to be appropriate to the study as each surfaced as concerns and needs of participants in individual and focus group interviews. Differentiated instruction was an additional theme that surfaced after analyzing interview transcriptions.

The conceptual framework of this study was further used to interpret the lived experiences of teachers and draw together the multiple theoretical perspectives of the constructivist, experiential, and humanistic learning theories (Dennick, 2012). These learning

theories helped explore the emerging themes of effective writing instruction through writing workshop, collaboration through professional development, and teacher reflection. The data collected from participants in the individual interviews along with the focus group session revealed the need to further explore effective writing strategies to support teacher instruction. The majority of participants possessed a limited repertoire of effective writing strategies with two participants having no knowledge or training of strategies. The constructivist view of learning implies that meaning and understanding of these writing strategies depend on background knowledge and engagement in new learning opportunities (Dennick, 2012). Some participants utilized writing workshop to teach writing skills, but they continued to feel unsuccessful with the quality of effective instruction provided to their students while others had no training in how to implement writing workshop. Participants shared their desire for new learning opportunities to be provided. According to Fountas and Pinnell (2001), writing workshop is a vehicle that enables teachers to provide effective instruction through a whole group mini-lesson, guided practice, and independent practice to assess student mastery. Data were similar to the study conducted by Bingham and Hall-Kenyon (2013) where they examined teachers' beliefs on implementing writing workshop. These researchers reported that teachers were inconsistent in their use of the routines in the teaching of writing just as the participants in this study.

The need for collaboration through professional development was discussed by participants throughout the individual interviews and the focus group session. Data collected from participants' interviews supported the need for professional development in providing effective writing instruction while differentiating for all learners. Marzano (2003) conveyed that consistent professional development must include well-planned sessions providing teachers with

training that is useful and will positively impact student achievement. The constructivist and humanistic learning theories support the need for teachers to be members of active learning communities and discuss effective writing strategies for workshop implementation and differentiation (Dennick, 2012). The doctoral project for the study includes sessions that are designed to provide teachers with meaningful training to support effective writing instruction and the acquisition of new knowledge through collaboration.

Teacher reflection was not a major theme that surfaced in the data, but it was a theme discussed by participants. According to Larrivee (2013), when teachers reflect on their practices, they discover new ways to provide more effective instruction for students. Emphasis on personal reflection is included as an aspect of the experiential learning theory which signifies reflection as a process that can take place individually or collaboratively and one that can be enhanced by documentation and feedback (Dennick, 2012). Teacher reflection is a component of the professional development training as participants prepare to be better equipped to meet the challenges of CCSS and is further researched in the literature review in section three.

The CCSS for writing have overwhelmed participants and made them aware of the additional levels of understanding needed to successfully implement the new standards. The process of deconstructing CCSS writing standards allows teachers to fully understand the rigor and expectations for student mastery. Collaborating with colleagues is another important factor for teachers to consider when implementing CCSS in writing. Collaboration amongst teachers of the same grade allows teachers to share best practices and reflect on their own current practice through discussion and peer observation. Writing workshop is the overarching concept used to drive teaching and learning in writing instruction. When teachers collaborate and reflect on current writing instruction, professional development experiences, and student outcomes,

conversations begin to surface in terms of how to best integrate writing across all contents each day to fulfill the CCSS requirement for students to write 50% of the instructional day (CCSSI, 2014).

Participants shared their concerns for the increased expectations CCSS has brought about since NCLB and how this gap has affected student achievement in writing. Participants also shared how even though they are fond of the balanced literacy framework in the school district, they do not feel all teachers are equipped with the level of training needed to effectively implement the framework on a daily basis. Time emerged as one of the greatest concerns of interview participants. The lack of time in a school week has taken away from professional development opportunities. Consequently, the time spent in professional development settings has not always been intentional and meaningful. Participants discussed the power of collaboration and reflection on job-embedded practice with colleagues.

Composite Description

It is important to triangulate data using different methods in order to support credibility and validity of a study (Creswell, 2012). I confirmed the authenticity of data using the process of member checking. During each interview, participants' responses were restated and questions were asked to ensure the response was understood accurately. Audio was uploaded to a secure computer and then sent to a professional transcription service to be transcribed. Once transcriptions were reviewed, participants received a copy of their interview and were given 1 week to review the transcriptions and report any discrepancies to me. Focus group participants were given a copy of the focus group interview transcription in its entirety and were also given 1 week to review and report any discrepancies. No discrepant cases were reported from individual or focus group participants.

Data were color coded to identify significant themes that surfaced throughout all interviews. The three major themes that surfaced in the findings included the lack of professional development in effective writing instructional methods and strategies, the frustrations of implementing the CCSS in writing and not knowing what to teach due to the increased rigor of the standards, as well as differentiating writing instruction to support student achievement.

The first two major themes, lack of professional development in effective writing instructional methods and strategies and the need for effective writing instructional methods and strategies, were addressed in the review of literature in Section 2. The topics were not only a local school problem but were also confirmed as broader issues in the evidence of the problem from the professional literature. The CCSS writing standards require teachers to change how writing has been taught in classrooms across the country at all levels. In examining teachers' perspectives on current writing instruction and strategies at all levels, Dunn (2011) found that teachers were challenged by large class sizes, the need for small group and individual conferencing, and integrating reading and writing throughout the curriculum. Participants in the study shared similar concerns as they struggled to provide students with effective instruction to meet the needs of individual learners and integrate writing across the curriculum.

A national concern for writing instruction was discovered through conversations Zumbrunn and Krause (2012) had with effective school leaders. These researchers conveyed that daily writing instruction begins with clear flexible planning and effective instruction encompasses scaffolding collaboration between the teacher and the student. Cutler and Graham (2008) conducted a national survey of a random sample of primary grade teachers of writing. The percentage of teachers who taught writing using a combination of process and skills instruction was 72%. However, there was a variability among teachers in the survey results when

asked about the consistency of using specific skills. The need for consistency of teaching writing daily along with the use of effective methods and strategies for implementing the CCSS writing standards were topics of conversation among all participants at the local school.

In the data collected from participants in the study, the use of the 6 + 1 Trait Writing model (Culham, 2003) was mentioned as a method used in teaching writing. In the review of literature, this method was explained as the teaching of competencies that are taught and assessed through formulaic writing at the local school. The CCSS in writing require a rigor of instruction that goes beyond the teaching of writing skills in isolation through formulaic writing.

Other studies reviewed reiterated the importance of writing instruction being more than a subject taught in isolation during a specific block of time during the school day. Weinstein (2013) reviewed professional resources on best practices in writing instruction that focused on the writing standards in the CCSS and explained that non-fiction texts with more rigorous text complexity used as anchor reading passages can engage student thinking in writing. Students write about real world scenarios and are more adept to respond to nonfiction passages in the content areas as specific content lends itself to topics where students hold adequate levels of background knowledge. Furthermore, Weinstein (2013) shared that teachers need to be equipped with new strategies to expose students to a higher level of text complexity and observe models of how to integrate non-fiction texts with writing responses in order to provide effective instruction for students.

It was evident in the literature that effective writing instruction is needed to support student success with the rigor of the CCSS standards. Participants in the study conveyed a need for professional development to provide them with tools for planning effective writing instruction that goes beyond the isolated writing workshop block of time in their instructional

day. Writing is a part of many aspects of students' daily lives and is not restricted to one period a day. In order to provide teachers with professional development training in effective writing instruction, researchers have discussed how the beliefs of teachers and how they view their teaching practices are important to reflect upon and understand. In fact, the attitudes of teachers and their past experiences can impact the future of their instruction and the success of their students (Robinson & Atkinson, 2002). Meaningful professional development supports teachers in planning effective writing instruction that will positively impact their performance and confidence when provided with the methods, strategies, and support to do so.

Another major theme that surfaced was the struggle to implement the CCSS writing standards due to the increased rigor of the standards and how to effectively deliver those standards to students. Scholars have emphasized students writing across all disciplines, for real purposes, and to build a foundation for college readiness was brought to light through information provided by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers (2010). Participants in this study were concerned with their lack of understanding of the writing standards and the uncertainty of what was expected in supporting students in writing across all disciplines. Writing instruction has consisted of a writing workshop block of time each day where students are taught writing skills in isolation with the final product being a formulaic writing piece of three to five paragraphs. The experiences of participants in this study varied in the use of writing workshop from having no knowledge to being proficient in using the basic components of the workshop model.

In a study of teacher practices in writing by McCarthy (2008), teachers were at different levels of use with their instruction as well. Some teachers implemented writing workshop exclusively, others were integrating writing across the curriculum, while other teachers taught

the different writing genres in isolation or used research- based programs designed to teach writing. The rigor of instruction expected with the implementation of the CCSS writing standards extends beyond the current level of knowledge and training of participants at the local school. Thus lie the frustrations and challenges teachers encounter to provide effective writing instruction that is integrated across the curriculum. In addition to the training, teachers need to be well-versed with a complete understanding of the standards and the specific skills to be mastered by students on each grade level.

Aside from teachers being knowledgeable of the writing standards, they are charged with providing instructional methods and strategies for delivering effective instruction and knowing how to assess the CCSS writing standards. Assessing writing no longer encompasses a writing piece that is completed over the course of a week or more assigning scores of exceeds, meets, or does not meet. The CCSS standards call for extremely high levels of proficiency. In order to provide students with writing instruction that yields high levels of proficiency, teachers need to understand the standards they are to teach, how to effectively teach the standards, and how to assess the standards to determine student mastery. Calkins et al. advised that the quality of writing expected to be accomplished by effective instruction of the CCSS writing standards can be reached by requiring the "explicit instruction, opportunity for practice, centrality of feedback, assessment-based instruction, and a spiral curriculum that have all been a hallmark of a rigorous writing workshop" (Calkins et al., 2012, p. 112). Participants in this study along with teachers at the local school are in different places with writing instruction and are struggling with full implementation of the CCSS writing standards. Differentiating writing instruction to support student achievement was not reviewed in Section Two, but it is a major focus of the literature review in Section Three.

Additional themes emerged throughout the analysis of data that are worthy of mentioning. Reflection of personal teaching practices was discussed in both individual and focus group interviews. Teacher reflection was a topic in the conceptual framework that served as a guide for this study. Participant B shared during an individual interview that she learned the most when reflecting on how a certain strategy was implemented and the impact it had on student achievement. She added that the reflection component of current professional development sessions is almost always left out. Participant D explained a strategy that she used to lead her grade level through the reflective process using data analysis protocols of student work. She shared that the reflection promoted forward thinking by the team and that she wished more time was allotted during collaborative planning for reflection. Focus group participants C and D shared their interest in using video to observe peers in action as a way to enhance job-embedded professional development and promote reflective thinking. Although they had both read research on peer-observations through video and the importance of being reflective practitioners, neither have had the opportunity to try it. The importance of teachers being honest with themselves as they reflect upon their knowledge, training, and experiences in the teaching of writing in order to provide effective instruction for students will be further examined as a subtopic in section three. Given the many changes in writing instruction due to common core standards, local school challenges, and changes in the state assessment, teachers must be reflective thinkers to refine teaching practices and truly understand the needs of their students.

Another theme that surfaced in the interview data included vertical collaboration among teachers in the school. Vertical collaboration occurs when teachers from more than one grade assemble to discuss how the writing standards at each level are represented and the how the skills are aligned. When teachers understand what students have learned in writing thus far as well as

the expectations of writing skills for the current year, writing standards are easier to interpret. For example, a fifth grade teacher in the focus group interview explained how he planned to introduce the concept of a counter-argument in opinion writing to his students. He first analyzed opinion writing standards in fourth grade to see that students have only had to take a stance on one side of the argument; therefore, he knew that introducing the counter-argument was an entirely new concept for fifth graders. The same participant shared the desire to further collaborate with teachers in other grade levels to gain a vertical perspective of standards and how to teach them most effectively. Participant E revealed during an individual interview that she was hopeful at the beginning of the year to learn that the school had content-specific vertical teams. Unfortunately, as these teams began to collaborate, the participant learned that they were utilized more as social planning committees. Her desire to collaborate with teachers vertically was more standards focused. Analyzing standards vertically allows teachers to have clear expectations and plan for instruction appropriately through authentic collaboration. It is important to capitalize on teaching and learning, with the focus on learning.

A topic of discussion that surfaced during interviews and one that has evolved as a strategy at the local school is evidence-based writing. The 2014-2015 school year was the first year the state has not required fifth grade students to pass an end of the year writing assessment to be promoted to the sixth grade. Instead, the new state assessment will integrate writing in all content areas. The new assessment will include more evidence-based writing in response to real-world scenarios pertaining to content in math, science, and social studies. Teachers expressed a concern about the types of questioning students would encounter on the new assessment and how to provide effective writing instruction to prepare students for success. They have relied on a variety of strategies they feel may possibly be sufficient in supporting students. Participants

disclosed some of this uncertainty and even frustration in individual and focus group interviews. Participant D, a veteran fourth grade teacher, mentioned that she has been frustrated with the vague examples provided by the state in preparing students to produce evidence-based writing. During the focus group interview, Participants A and C were concerned that they were not equipped with the knowledge needed to model evidence-based writing for their students. Participant A added that although many strategies have been mentioned by the district and school, she was not sure how effective they actually are after seeing her students struggle to implement them. Limited training has been provided across the district and local school to prepare teachers in teaching evidence-based writing.

Conclusion

Through the analysis of the data, it is apparent that teachers in grades 3-5 at the local school have been impacted and challenged by the mandates of the Common Core writing standards. Teachers have also been faced with a variety of challenges in implementing effective writing instruction due to the lack of training in the past and present in research-based writing strategies. Both the individual interviews and focus group interview provided answers that addressed the first research question: How do teachers perceive the impact of the CCSS writing standards on their current writing instructional practices? One of the major themes that surfaced in this study was, in fact, the sizeable impact common core writing standards have had on instruction including the challenge of time and confusion in analyzing standards. Teachers have struggled to analyze standards and determine exactly what students should know and be able to do. The project in this study carries teachers through protocols to properly analyze standards, design assessments that align to standards, and analyze student work to reflect on the mastery of standards.

Another theme that directly related to the first research question was the need for differentiated writing instruction and what purposeful differentiation looks like. Differentiation is a relatively new term to educators in the 21st century. True differentiation allows students to learn at their greatest human capacity, but not all teachers know how to implement such strategies during writing instruction. Differentiation concerns were revealed through both individual and focus group interviews. Teachers believed that the CCSS have made it more difficult to differentiate for all learners due to the increased level of rigor. This topic will be further examined in the literature review in section three. It was determined that differentiated instruction is essential to providing effective writing instruction through the implementation of CCSS.

Two additional themes seen when analyzing the data answered the second research question of the study: What do teachers feel they need in order to provide effective writing instruction that supports the CCSS writing expectations? Teachers felt that they needed significantly more support in writing instruction due to the lack of training in preservice teacher programs and often times at the district and local school level. Training should be embedded in research-based strategies and standards. Offering more training opportunities for teachers at the local school will help address challenges faced with the above themes and the first research question, which parallels to the fourth theme identified in data analysis, professional development. More professional development opportunities need to be provided to teachers that focus on effective writing instruction, which includes, but is not limited to, research-based strategies such as differentiation, evidence-based writing, and assessment, all strategies that participants discussed repeatedly in interviews. Although all identified themes are important, participants expressed the need for professional development in writing instruction to be their

greatest need and concern, specifically focused on research-based writing strategies. Teacher needs turn into student needs.

The proposed project for this study in Section 3 is a professional development curriculum encompassing training and materials on research-based writing strategies to help teachers implement Common Core writing standards and positively impact student achievement.

Section 3: The Project

Rationale

The project chosen for this study is a professional development model designed to support teachers in developing effective lessons in writing instruction, incorporating differentiated instruction, and thus increase student achievement. Unfortunately, the surface-level instruction and training in writing, or lack thereof, have hindered teachers' ability to effectively teach writing and enhance student achievement. Given proper training in research-based strategies—through modeling, discussion, and reflection—teachers will be able to gain a deeper understanding of how to implement such them and maximize writing instruction as they engage in this continuous cycle of improvement (Killion & Roy, 2009). The professional development model will support teachers in analyzing and understanding the common core writing standards and job-embedded learning opportunities to practice the effective writing strategies presented. In addition, teachers will learn how to incorporate differentiation within the lessons developed for effective writing instruction.

According to results from the six individual interviews and the six-teacher focus group session, training at the college level in teacher preparation programs was scarce or failed to be a part of their literacy training. A total of 12 teachers were involved in the study from the same elementary school and are representative of grades 3-5. At best, very few participants received knowledge of writing instruction but most agreed they did not receive effective strategies for teaching writing. The majority of participants concurred that training in reading instruction took priority in literacy training during college coursework. A major focus of conversation among participants was a concern for the need to be equipped with effective strategies in support of writing instruction to meet common core expectations. Teachers are faced with the challenge of

providing instruction for students who are functioning at a wide range of ability levels. In order to provide the support necessary to improve student achievement in writing for all students, teachers expressed the need to be equipped with differentiation tools that can be incorporated in their instruction.

The participants in this study conveyed that current writing instructional practices fail to provide students with the expectations and rigor of the CCSS writing standards. The language arts department in the school district provides professional development opportunities for teachers, but the sessions are held after school hours and on Saturdays. The participation in training provided for teachers across the district is limited; therefore, the distribution of new learning is inconsistent in classrooms. There is a small percentage of teachers at the local school who attend professional development. The two literacy coaches at the school are expected to provide training for teachers in grades K-5 during the regular school day which can be challenging due to the demands on teachers' schedules. Participants mentioned a need for modeling of effective writing strategies by the literacy coaches along with vertical collaboration, collaborative grade-level planning, and professional development in writing at the local school.

Writers' workshop, which incorporates the use of effective writing strategies, is an expectation in all classrooms at the local school. The data collected from teachers in the study indicated there are those who lack the knowledge and training of the workshop model and how to utilize research-based strategies to provide effective writing instruction for students. In addition, participants discussed the need for support with differentiating writing instruction in order to meet the needs of all students in their classrooms.

Consequently, participants indicated that the impact of common core writing standards on their ability to provide effective writing instruction is among their highest instructional

challenges. Data collected from individual interviews and the focus group session indicated a concern whereby participants are unclear on how the CCSS writing standards are to be deconstructed and implemented. As a matter of fact, they shared that writing has been taught in isolation. Some participants shared that writing was not a focus during the No Child Left Behind era leaving a gap in instruction for many students as well as a lack of professional development in effective writing instruction for teachers.

When responding to the question on how the expectations of CCSS writing standards have impacted their writing instruction, participants conveyed that they could see the value in the standards but were unclear on how to implement the standards. CCSS inform teachers what to teach but do not provide them with strategies on how to effectively teach the writing standards. Participants mentioned the need for time to deconstruct the writing standards in order to understand what they should be teaching students. In addition, due to the depth and rigor of the standards, training with implementation of the writing standards was a concern expressed by participants.

Unfortunately, teachers at the local school are at the knowledge level with understanding the meaning of the complex standards and how to teach them. They understand that there are a specified number of standards for writing, but they do not understand the depth and rigor of the standards. Due to the rigor of the CCSS writing standards, participants shared the need for additional training not only in the use of effective writing strategies but also with the basic understanding of the standards. The professional development project is designed to meet the needs of participants that surfaced as major themes in the study. Through the use of the job-embedded professional development model, teachers will be provided with the opportunity to receive training during the school day in a collaborative grade level setting. The literacy coaches

who receive the in-depth training of the writing standards and how to implement them, will be able to support teachers during their common grade level planning period. During the 45-minute session each week, the literacy coaches will work with teachers on deconstructing the writing standards for a better understanding of what skills they are to be teaching. In order for teachers to implement the CCSS writing standards, they will be provided with training using effective writing strategies and support through the weekly professional development sessions. The literacy coaches will also be available for modeling the strategies in the classroom for teachers and provide peer coaching support as well. The professional development model will potentially provide teachers with the knowledge and training necessary to implement the CCSS standards effectively and improve student achievement in writing.

Review of the Literature

A literature review was conducted using key terms based on themes that surfaced during individual and focus group interviews. These key terms included *effective professional, development, job-embedded, adult, learners, reflective, practitioners, learning, styles, ELL learners, differentiated, instruction, and differentiation*. Databases used in the review were ERIC, Education Research Complete, and EBSCO.

The following literature review offers an in-depth discussion of the two most significant concerns revealed in the focus group and individual interviews: the need for effective, job-embedded professional development and for differentiation in writing instruction. Job-embedded professional development is the driving force behind the proposed professional development project to maximize training opportunities for teachers and provide a setting that is conducive to collaboration, the analysis of common core writing standards, observation, and reflection. The second topic of significance of this literature review addresses the need for

differentiation in writing instruction. This section includes research-based strategies and exposes ways to include these differentiation strategies in the proposed professional development project.

Effective Professional Development

There is an adage, "If you keep doing what you've always done, you'll keep getting what you've always gotten." This statement is instrumental in explaining the work that educators of the CCSSI are attempting to embrace. The CCSS mandate that the instruction used in past years is no longer adequate in preparing students for their future in the college realm and as lifelong learners (Calkins et al., 2012). In order to support teachers in transforming their teaching to incorporate more effective teaching practices, professional development is being researched as a possible vehicle to transport them in reaching their professional goals (Burke, 2013).

Effective professional development provides teachers with learning opportunities that will potentially enhance their pedagogy. Professional development supports teachers in acquiring new learning, but it does not end there. It also includes applying the new knowledge and putting into practice effective instructional strategies in order to foster student growth in learning (Avalos, 2007). In addition, Avalos conveyed that professional learning is a process that is very complex and demands the emotional involvement or buy-in of the participants. Teachers are at different places in their professional learning journey, so acquiring buy-in requires the professional development facilitator to understand the characteristics of adult learners. This topic will be discussed further in the literature review.

According to Lumpe, Czerniak, Haney, and Beltyukova (2012), professional development is effective in providing teachers with current practices that enhance their instruction. The focus of the professional development training should be determined by

teachers. In doing so, teachers will acquire new knowledge and training that is relevant to their instructional needs resulting in positive change in their pedagogy.

It is important to seek the support of the local school administrators when planning for professional development opportunities for teachers. School administrators are crucial to the success of effective professional development and the expectations of their staff to learn and grow as professionals. According to information provided by Croft, Coggshall, Dolan, Killian, and Powers (2010), school administrators can support continued teacher learning by emphasizing the importance of ongoing teacher development for all staff members, develop a school culture in which continued learning for staff is an expectation, be supportive of professional development facilitators, provide time within the school day for new learning, and use student performance data to advise staff on the professional development focus. When administrators deem professional development an expectation, new learning becomes a requirement and not a choice for teachers to be complacent.

In order for teachers to successfully deliver content standards, they must be familiar with the expectations and initiatives of their local school as well as the education system in place. All of these qualifications lead to the importance of a teacher identifying as a professional. In order to meet these qualifications, teachers must be involved in effective professional development on a consistent basis.

Teacher attitude is an important part of the success of professional development. "Teachers learn by doing, reading, reflecting, and collaborating with other teachers; by looking closely at students and their work, and by sharing their observations" (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011, p. 83). In fact, Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (2011) suggested that in order for professional development to foster change on teachers' pedagogy in the classroom,

teachers must have the desire to enhance their teaching practices and be involved in deciding the focus of the new learning. Enhancing professional practices requires teachers to change their mindset on professional learning.

Knight (2007) explained that as adult learners, teachers begin at various levels of change including the precontemplative stage, where blame is placed on others for the problems in their classroom. The contemplative stage is where teachers begin to look at the problem and how they might personally fix these problems. When teachers acknowledge there is a need to improve their instruction, they are ready to enter the preparation stage, taking time to plan what is needed to do to implement the change, and then move into the action stage, attempting new teaching practices. The maintenance stage is when teachers know what to do but ultimately forget to do it. The final stage is the termination stage at which point teachers have mastered the strategy and no longer need support. Many teachers are found stuck in the maintenance stage of knowing what to do after learning a specific strategy in an isolated professional learning session, but then forgetting the strategy once they are back in the classroom and wrapped up in daily routines (Knight, 2007). Learning experiences must be authentic and job-embedded when planning for adult professional learning (Casey, 2006). In order for teachers to learn the rigorous skills necessary to implement the CCSS, they will need to acquire new knowledge and apply the knowledge by being actively engaged in classrooms through job-embedded professional development (Croft et al., 2010). As a result, the new knowledge and training will become common practice in their classrooms.

Professional development that provides teachers with an opportunity to acquire the knowledge and training of new initiatives such as the CCSS writing standards and “how to” provide effective instruction occurs with the support of an expert in the area of new learning.

When conducting the literature review of the many different models of professional development, the model that is suitable for participants in this study appears to be the Job-embedded professional development (JEPD).

Job-embedded professional development. Job-embedded professional development can occur in different formats from teachers observing another classroom teacher in action with students focusing on the implementation of new practices to training received outside of the school. It is important for a facilitator of JEPD to be able to model quality instruction for participants in teachers' classrooms in order to help them improve their practice as well (West & Saphier, 2009). Job-embedded professional development also includes teachers as active participants in the learning process versus being the passive recipient of new knowledge and skills. According to Croft et al. (2010), JEPD can serve as an effective tool in improving student achievement when fully implemented with support of administrators at the local school and beyond. Consequently, JEPD supports the practice of teacher training being directly associated with their work in the classroom with some training taking place with their students in the classroom instead of providing the training away from the classroom during meetings (Nolan & Hoover, 2004). Just as educators are taught early on that students learn better by doing, teachers thrive by hands-on learning as well.

L'Allier and Elish-Piper (2006) reported the highest student gains in classrooms in which a literacy coach was engaged the most with teachers. In this setting, the literacy coach would model lessons for teachers and meet with the teacher to assist in lesson planning and analysis of student data. The student scores were analyzed, and students with the highest average gains were supported by a literacy coach with a reading teacher endorsement versus students who had the

lowest average gains and received support from a literacy coach who did not possess a reading endorsement or an advanced degree.

Reflective practitioners. The education profession expects teachers to be reflective practitioners, take ownership of their work, be creative, use research in their work, and be involved in ongoing professional development opportunities for continuous improvement of their craft (Lino, 2014). In an ecological model of professional development, Lino (2014) reflected on the impact of professional development training with elementary teachers and suggested that teachers should possess six major qualifications: Teachers should know their curriculum and be content specialists. Not only do teachers need to be content experts, but they also need to be able to create lessons that are appropriate for their students. As teachers create effective lessons, they must be able to meet the needs of all learners in their classroom. In addition, teachers should have a variety of strategies and techniques to use in order to teach the objectives from the curriculum content that will lead to student mastery of the objectives. Finally, teachers should reflect on current practices and make the changes necessary to accommodate for students' needs.

Meaningful reflection takes place in professional learning communities, or bodies of educators who believe in a common goal and intend to promote change that positively affects teaching and learning (Lindsey, Jungwirth, Pahl, & Lindsey, 2009). Establishing professional learning communities instills a culture of collaboration amongst teachers that is cyclical in nature. A learning community can be continually assessed to meet the needs of teachers and become reactive to student achievement throughout a school year. In a learning community, teachers are able to connect theory to practice and discuss the integration of new and previous learning as it pertains to current standards (Myers, 2013). Research-based strategies were introduced and reinforced through modeling, peer observations, and reflection. The collaboration

that occurred involved systematically examining teaching practices with the ultimate goal of becoming more effective (Myers, 2013). Learning communities serve as the foundation for the professional development project in which collaboration, taking ownership of responsibilities, and the use of research-based strategies will positively impact effective instruction and improve student achievement in writing.

A study was conducted with 20 pre-service teacher candidates to determine the effectiveness of learning communities and reflective collaboration through lesson study and design. Candidates produced reports of the lessons which were then evaluated based on focus, language focus, and level of reflection. Myers (2013) concluded that the reports were more teacher-centered and focused on the process of being reflective versus the actual student performance. While this was not the intended outcome, Myers (2013) gained insight on the need to lead teachers through the reflective process in more of a job-embedded setting. Learning communities are the vehicle for leading job-embedded professional development as teachers collaborate and reflect while experiencing first-hand the reactions and products that stem from implementing standards.

Not every strategy and belief system has a positive impact on student achievement. We can assume that all teachers have positive intentions when instructing students; however, many teachers do not know the extent of their impact despite exhausted efforts. Hattie (2013) has encouraged teachers to “know thy impact” and become evaluators of their own impact. In a study conducted over the course of 15 years based on 800 meta-analyses relating to 138 influences of achievement on school-aged children, Hattie found themes such as ongoing feedback and collaboration to be some of the few influences that have a significant impact on student achievement over time (Hattie, 2013). Ongoing feedback to students is not authentic unless

teachers understand the learning styles of students as well as what they are expected to know and do in order to master standards.

When teachers collaborate in learning communities, they are able to analyze standards and determine best practices for delivering standards to students in a variety of differentiated methods. Effective teachers use their reflections to guide and enhance future instruction which includes differentiating for each learner to provide optimum learning that will improve student achievement.

Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated instruction is a term that has been defined, re-defined, misinterpreted, and misused for many years in education. Differentiation is a method to approach teaching and learning in the context of a classroom that contains the following components: learning environment, standards, instructional strategies, and assessments (Tomlinson & Imbreau, 2010). Each of these components must be shaped and cultivated to ensure that all students maximize their full learning capacity.

In a study conducted by the Oakwood City School District Board of Education members in Dayton, Ohio, a decision was made to create a system-wide approach to ensure that teachers implemented differentiation strategies in all classrooms (Kappler & Weckstein, 2012). Just as students need instruction differentiated to meet their learning needs, leaders in the district believed that teachers should receive differentiated evaluation based on how they perceived information best. The study described Tomlinson's fire and light approach to identify strategies and determine methods of implementation (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010). The light drew teachers to the change by providing professional development opportunities, modeling strategies, and celebrating the work of teachers. The fire symbolized the use of cognitive disaccord to help

teachers who needed to change in order to understand the purpose of the work before they were able to recognize what they are doing may not have been best for students (Kappler & Weckstein, 2012). The notion of behavior preceding the belief meets teachers where they are in the change process and encourages them to reflect on their own practice before embarking upon a new strategy.

Additionally, the school district worked together to create a rubric to assess teachers' use of differentiation in classrooms after intentional professional development trainings took place. The rubric aligned interest, readiness, strength learning profile, content, process, and product to the level in which teachers were mastering the differentiation target: basic, developing, or distinguished (Kappler & Weckstein, 2012). In the end, teachers felt comfortable when sharing goals, accomplishments, reflections, and student achievement. The results of the study reiterated the message shared by participants from the data that differentiating learning for teachers is just as important as differentiating learning for students.

As with the Kappler and Weckstein (2012) study of a district's approach to ensuring differentiated instruction in all classrooms, the following study occurred in an elementary school setting as an approach to develop teachers as confident and effective leaders for differentiated classrooms (Weber, Johnson, & Trip, 2013). Student test scores had been on the decline in recent years so the administration studied the changing student population. With the influx of more ELLs and low performance of these students, learning needs of all students were not being met. The administration and instructional lead teachers designed a differentiation framework for the school year that included grade level book discussions, whole staff workshops on content differentiation and creative thinking strategies, classroom walk-throughs, observations, and a feedback system (Weber et al., 2013). Teachers were able to design a formula that best fit their

teaching style and classroom because a variety of strategies were provided to implement differentiated instruction.

As a result, additional support and materials were provided to ensure that teachers were able to successfully carry out the instruction modeled in workshops. Model videos and eventually videos from model teachers within the school proved to be essential tools for seeing teachers in action with students and modeling true implementation of differentiation strategies. Administrators reflected and suggested that getting experts involved in the process was critical. Model videos were first used from the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD). Learning communities were established among grade level teams to continue the work throughout the year on a weekly basis. Change slowly began to take place in the school and improvement in teacher instruction was seen through administrator observations. Time often proved to be a challenge but schedules were essential to managing the time and setting aside regular meetings to complete the school-wide differentiation initiative. The importance of addressing the needs of all learners when differentiating instruction was also a challenge that was acknowledged.

It can be challenging to know which differentiation strategies are most successful in any given classroom. A qualitative case study was conducted with second and third grade classrooms to analyze the effects of implementing differentiated instructional strategies to address the literacy needs of academically diverse learners (Tobin & McInnes, 2008). Ten classroom teachers participated in two 3-hour workshops to learn strategies to use when working with diverse learners. Classroom observations, video and audio recordings, student work samples, and follow up interviews with each teacher were used to determine the effectiveness of the strategies implemented from training sessions (Tobin & McInnes, 2008). Two teachers specifically stood

out in successfully differentiating for all learners. Strategies consistent among these two teachers included explicit instruction, student choice, a highly engaging literacy environment, and the use of feedback through formative assessments (Tobin & McInnes, 2008). The researchers noted that results revealed the importance of teachers utilizing variations of differentiated instruction that align to their own professional beliefs, curriculum interests, and school resources.

English language learners (ELLs) can be the most difficult type of student for whom teachers must provide differentiation. Given that these students often receive additional support from an ELL teacher as well as daily accommodations, teachers forget that ELL students need differentiated instruction as well. Martin and Green (2012) have used learning centers to accommodate for the learning needs of ELLs. Learning centers are differentiated groups where students learn at their current level based on their individualized learning needs. The peer-reviewed anecdotal report provided information on how the use of learning centers began in the elementary setting and were successful over time. Eventually, one of the researchers brought learning centers to her high school science classroom. Learning centers began with a central theme followed by information for students using visuals, audio, and concrete artifacts. Students in the science classroom were able to construct their own learning with peers as they solved problems. Reading fluency levels of students determined the activities to ensure that students were able to understand the content. With reading and writing being an integral part of subjects such as science and social studies, an ELL or struggling student should not fail the subject due to challenges in reading and writing. Understanding the content should always be the priority. Although learning centers in this study were tailored to ELLs, the methods of differentiation can be used and adapted to serve a variety of learners. The study also included a learning center activity framework that teachers used as a guide when creating their own learning center unit.

The use of differentiation in daily instruction provides individual learners at all ability levels with the support needed to be successful in all subject areas.

Differentiation is sometimes misconstrued or taken out of context. Teachers believe small group instruction to be differentiation, yet all students eventually end up doing the same task at each station or in each group. This is not differentiation because it is not a "one size fits all" strategy. Tieso (2013) stated that differentiation is an ongoing process where teachers take full responsibility for students' learning and getting to know each student's ability in every content area. *Moving the Past Forward* is a curriculum framework and pacing guide for bringing history alive for students using differentiated instruction, higher order thinking, and student-centered strategies (Tieso, 2013). The framework aligned state and national common core standards with district instructional pacing guides to create a history curriculum that addressed the strengths and learning styles of all students. Goals used when creating individual history units were designed to be open-ended and abstract in order for students to be able to produce a variety of outcomes. When goals and objectives are too simple, it hinders students' creativity and critical thinking abilities.

Pre-assessments were highly recommended in this study to determine students' background knowledge of a topic. By analyzing pre-assessments, teachers were able to gain insight on what students already know and to what level. Planning for differentiated instruction became more transparent and purposeful. The curriculum framework guide served as an effective resource for teachers as they planned their own history units in the elementary setting (Tieso, 2013). Formative assessments such as pre-assessments not only inform instruction for the whole class but also provide the teacher with important data to differentiate for individual learners.

Differentiating instruction is only effective when teachers are able to identify and accommodate for the learning needs of each individual student in the classroom. Learning needs are determined by the intellectual abilities of students. Students' strengths, challenges, and interests can reveal their multiple intelligences. According to Gardner (2011), multiple intelligences represent methods of processing information. He expanded upon his theory of multiple intelligences in the context of an educational setting, sharing that children learn best from their own experiences. Additionally, Gardner (2011) explained how children possess multiple intelligences that appear when learning is most meaningful. Teachers can assess the multiple intelligences of students through observations, conversations, and surveys. It is important for teachers to understand that students may learn through a variety of intelligences and that these intelligences may change over time due to learning environments, the acquisition of new knowledge, and student experiences. Multiple intelligences can additionally be revealed when students are given opportunities to collaborate in the classroom. Collaboration leads to problem solving and the development of critical thinkers (Boss et al., 2013). Students can use individual strengths to contribute to their ability to be problem solvers as they progress toward college and career readiness.

Multiple intelligences are often misinterpreted as learning styles. Learning styles represent the methods by which an individual approaches a task. Perhaps the most widely accepted learning style model is the Kolb learning style model which interpreted how humans learned experientially (Kolb, 1984). The model used a questionnaire to categorically measure four distinguishable learning styles: diverging, assimilating, converging, and accommodating (Manolis, Burns, Assudani, & Chinta, 2013). Kolb's work has been critiqued over time and questioned by many researchers. A study conducted by Manolis et al. (2013) further examined

the Kolb learning style model (1984) and attempted to transform the categorical measure to a continuous measure that determines the degree of a particular learning style. Understanding to what degree an individual is feeling, watching, thinking, or doing expands on Kolb's two-dimensional approach to determining learning styles. The newly constructed continuous measure in the study allowed participants to provide information regarding multiple dimensions of learning styles. The distinguishable learning styles denoted in the scores were all accounted for and analyzed individually. Results indicated that although one learning style revealed itself as dominant, additional learning styles were important to consider (Manolis et al., 2013). Research has yet to provide concrete evidence that shows a consistent change in learning outcomes based on the delivery method of knowledge (Riener & Willingham, 2010).

Teachers should be cautious in their approach in implementing instructional strategies based on the identification of learning styles alone. It is also a challenge to identify the learning styles of others that are different from a teacher's own learning style. Gardner (2011) has argued that learning styles are merely a hypothesis of how individuals approach materials and not how they actually process and solve information. He believed that humans possess multiple intelligences that work best when used together. Gardner (2011) researched biological and cultural aspects of human behavior to categorize behaviors that met his criteria for intelligences. Criteria are centered on neurological and environmental factors that affect how an individual is capable of learning. Intelligences include logical-mathematical, linguistic intelligence, spatial, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal (Gardner, 2011). Teachers can enhance writing instruction through the identification of students' multiple intelligences and integration of strategies that engages a variety of these intelligences for students. More extensive research on multiple intelligences and learning styles and how they pertain to students of specific

ages and ability will contribute to the success of teachers implementing effective instruction for all learners.

Summary

Many topics surfaced as I researched articles on professional development in peer-reviewed journals. The literature included the importance of having administrative support when planning professional development training for teachers. The importance of including teachers in making decisions about the new learning that will transpire during professional development sessions to meet their needs is crucial in receiving their buy-in or approval. Teachers are adult learners and function at different levels of knowledge, training, and experience in their instruction. They are also individuals with different characteristics of learning. These characteristics affect their buy-in to the new learning which is important for the facilitator to know and understand when planning for the delivery of professional development.

The emphasis on teachers being reflective practitioners in assessing the impact of professional development on their teaching and improving student achievement appeared in the literature as well. Current research on effective professional development indicated a shift from teachers being receivers of new knowledge in a lecture type setting to teachers being actively engaged in the learning process by being a part of professional learning communities. The literature on effective professional development provided valuable information that was instrumental in developing the doctoral project.

A variety of peer-reviewed studies also contributed to understanding of differentiated instruction. Findings included accounts from phenomenological studies on the implementation of differentiation in pre-service elementary education programs and how participants applied this knowledge successfully-in their own classrooms (Dee, 2011). Furthermore, in a discussion of one

school system's approach to ensure the practice of differentiated instruction in all classrooms, a survey was administered to teachers requesting them to reflect on their practice of differentiated instruction in their classrooms. The survey results in the anecdotal report noted that teachers did not fully understand what differentiation is supposed to look like in the classroom setting (Kappler & Weckstein, 2012). Teachers found it challenging to accommodate for multiple learning needs of their students. These references provided a variety of practices of teacher training, classroom implementation, and reflection of differentiation in the classroom as it relates to student achievement.

Additionally, there is a misconception about multiple intelligences and learning styles and how these both contribute to differentiating instruction. Gardner's (2011) research has identified eight multiple intelligences that aid in identifying ways individuals successfully process information. When teachers identify the multiple intelligences of students they gain a deeper insight on how students learn and react to learning environments. On the contrary, some researchers believe learning styles to be successful approaches to differentiating instruction. Teachers can categorize ways students approach a task and understand how they learn through multiple dimensions (Manolis et al., 2012). A thorough understanding of multiple intelligences and learning styles is needed to successfully implement differentiated instructional strategies.

The review of literature serves as a foundation of job-embedded professional development practices as well as differentiated instructional methods. Both topics are more recent in the realm of education-and continue to change and strengthen the practice of educators as in sharing their experiences and reflecting on their own practice. The proposed project in this study will encourage teachers in grades 3-5 to differentiate instruction based on the planning and collaboration conducted in a designed to support effective writing instruction.

Project Description

The doctoral project consists of professional development training centered on best practices of writing instruction including student engagement and differentiation, the analysis of writing standards, teacher observation, teacher reflection, and collaboration. In order for teachers to receive support with effective writing instruction, I have chosen to provide knowledge of common core writing standards and how to analyze them to obtain a clear understanding of what students are expected to know and be able to do. Furthermore, the application piece of the professional development will provide teachers with strategies to effectively implement common core writing standards. Teachers will acquire the new knowledge and will apply what they learn to effective instructional practices in real time classroom training with students as well. Teachers at the local school have different background experiences in the acquisition of effective writing practices and skillsets for providing effective writing instruction for students that meets the rigor of CCSS expectations. Some veteran teachers who have seen initiatives such as NCLB) come and go over time, struggle with being open-minded and accepting of yet another initiative like CCSS. Even with the lack of acceptance or teacher buy-in, all teachers feel a certain responsibility to provide their students with effective instruction that leads to improved student achievement.

Facilitating the professional development project will be the literacy coach at the local school. The literacy coach is an expert in effective writing instruction with classroom experience who has received in-depth literacy training, particularly in elementary writing instruction and the CCSS writing standards. It is important for a facilitator of JEPD to be able to model quality instruction for participants in their classrooms in order to help them improve their practice as well (West & Saphier, 2009). The literacy coach will use the professional development design to

provide 9 weeks of new learning and hands-on experiences in teachers' classrooms. Moving forward, she will offer support to teachers who feel the need for additional modeling and peer coaching in order to accomplish full implementation of the professional development goals.

In addition to the research participants, all teachers in grades 3-5 will be involved in the professional development training. Consequently, each teacher will be asked to complete a pre-survey (Appendix A) to determine the level of support through the professional development training. Teachers at the local school are concerned about their lack of knowledge in understanding the depth of content of the CCSS writing standards. The rigor of the standards leaves teachers feeling somewhat inadequate in meeting the needs of students; however, participants in the study were knowledgeable about how they believed they learned best as educators. Participants in both individual interviews and in the focus group interview expressed that they learn best by collaboration, visual representations, and modeling of effective instructional strategies.

The training preference that surfaced in the data analysis was that of a job-embedded nature in which a literacy coach at the local school would facilitate and provide additional support for teachers. The data prompted further research on job-embedded professional development and effective facilitating of a literacy coach when developing a professional development project to meet the needs of teachers as found in the results of the study. Additionally, in order to provide teachers with the professional development training, the time and location of the training will be important factors that will determine the effectiveness of the training. Teachers will meet for 1 hour each week during their collaborative time for a total of 9 weeks. Meetings will take place during their planning time in the grade level leader's classroom. The professional development will follow the suggested timetable outlined in Appendix A.

A structured environment will be established during the first week by collectively agreeing on norms as a team. The multimedia presentation will be used as an introduction during the first week of collaborative planning to introduce teachers to the goals for our work together, an overview of the professional development, levels of use, and stages of concern. Teachers will identify with their personal level of use and stage of concern during week one and use these to set individual and team goals. In addition, identifying the levels of use of each teacher allows them to determine where they are with best practices in the professional development training. Research has shown that levels of use help teachers narrow their focus on how they currently carry out practices (Hord & Rutherford, 1987). Ongoing reflection on self-identified levels of use can help teachers grow in their knowledge and mindset. Similarly, stages of concern can contribute to reflection of practice as teachers must identify a particular concern that they possess as a new practice is being adopted (Killion & Roy, 2009). In this instance, the new practice will be analyzing standards and modifying writing instruction to best meet the needs of students.

Handouts on research-based instructional strategies in writing and differentiating writing instruction will be provided in advance in order for teachers to have peer-reviewed resources to assist with lesson planning and collaborative meetings. The strategies and resources on these handouts are research-based, current, and support district and local school initiatives. Protocols will be used to structure learning goals and ensure that collaboration remains focused on teaching and learning. These protocols were adapted from the National School Reform Faculty (2015) who are supported by the Learning Forward Professional Learning Association (2015). Both of these organizations are nationally recognized as respected institutions for research-based professional learning. Around the World is a protocol used to discuss a problem of practice in a way that everyone is able to understand and identify personal problems of practice (National

School Reform Faculty, 2015). A structured discussion is then conducted to assess the problems and offer solutions through inquiry and collaboration. ATLAS is a protocol designed to analyze student work on three levels: What facts can we determine by looking at the work? What assumptions can we make in regards to why students performed the way they did? What implications can we make for future instruction (Learning Forward, 2015)? ATLAS leverages teachers to each play a vital role in the collaboration process as everyone must participate. It also focuses solely on student work so teachers do not feel threatened or incompetent.

Teachers will use an analyzing standards template each week to dissect standards and determine learning targets for instruction the following week. I chose to use this document from Chappius, Stiggins, Chappius, and Arter (2012) because I had the opportunity to practice using this template while implementing and analyzing standard protocols at my previous school. I adapted it to align with our school needs and purpose. Other resources provided in the professional development project include a lesson plan template, observation guide, pre and post surveys, and a reflection of standards guide. I created these resources based on personal experiences and training as a facilitator, teacher needs shared during interviews, and research throughout my study. The agenda maintains a similar structure from week to week which includes a reflection on work completed from the previous week, analysis of the next writing standard, collaborating in pairs or as a grade level team to create lesson plans, debrief on observations, and the analysis of student work. Writing standards were chosen based on the district's instructional calendar and are introduced one week prior to when they are expected to be taught. The determination of student work samples is to be decided by the team as they create lessons and assessments.

As a literacy leader at my local school, I will serve as the facilitator for each grade level during this professional development project. The administrator over each corresponding grade level will attend each professional development session. Teachers will have opportunities to work with grade level teammates to deconstruct standards, observe the teaching of colleagues, reflect on lesson plans and teachings, as well as analyze student work. Standards were strategically chosen to reflect the district's instructional calendar for writing instruction for the fourth 9 weeks, the suggested time of year for this professional development to occur. Specific protocols will be used to guide teachers through the collaborative process to ensure that time is meaningful and purposeful. An introductory power point will be presented on the first day to define effective professional development and establish norms and goals for the work (Appendix A).

Traditionally, professional development at the local school has been delivered in meetings before school in a lecture type setting with limited teacher engagement. The majority of participants in the study conveyed the desire for professional development that would provide teachers with hands-on learning and support ongoing professional development of effective writing instruction throughout the year. The weekly professional development sessions will embody the belief system of a Professional Learning Community (PLC) and will operate with new learning presented by the literacy coach, provide actual classroom practice, and time for reflections and next steps each week. Professional learning communities are designed to have teachers closely examine their practice, determine areas in need of improvement, receive research-based strategies to support their instruction, practice the new learning in their classrooms, and be reflective of the new methods learned with other teachers (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). The work will transpire in a PLC format and will be indicative of the work

represented in the professional development design in the study. The work of the PLC is designed to not only support effective writing instruction for teachers, but it will also improve student achievement in writing. Professional learners within the PLC will generate solutions to problems and identify how they will learn to use the identified solution to create new programs, processes, and practices (Hord & Tobia, 2012). Teachers will have an opportunity to provide feedback on the effectiveness of the training and the impact it has on their writing instruction at the end of the nine week professional development training period.

Potential Resources and Existing Supports

All resources needed for this project are available at the local school and online. No expenses will be required to implement this project. Potential resources at the local school include the use of CCSS district resources such as instructional calendars and the analysis of writing standards accompanied by the use of a projector, computer, and screen. The library includes a section on professional resources where teachers can use teaching aids and kits to assist with planning for writing instruction. Suggested resources in Appendix A were selected based on current research of best practices in literacy instruction by valued experts in the field, district initiatives, and teacher needs expressed during interviews.

Existing supports to ensure that this professional development is successful include the local school principal, grade level administrators, grade level leaders, as well as myself, the facilitator. The school also has an administrator who oversees professional development for the entire school. She will be in charge of designating professional development days on the calendar and communicating all expectations ahead of time to teachers. The professional development administrator will also work closely with me to ensure that content within the professional development project align to local school and district initiatives. She will provide

feedback to me as the facilitator after each week's session, which will allow me to reflect on my own practice and refine the professional development each week as needed to meet the needs of teachers and students. In the event that any technical issues arise, the school has a technical support staff member who is available at all times.

Potential Barriers

While there are no anticipated barriers to keep the professional development project from taking place in its entirety, three possible barriers come to mind that could potentially hinder the effectiveness of the overall project. The first barrier is time. Teachers often get pulled away for student support meetings, discipline meetings, and parent conferences during their collaborative planning time. If teachers are unable to participate consistently, then they will not experience the learning and growth in full capacity. Communication with the professional development administrator would hopefully keep these interruptions to a minimum.

The second potential barrier in the proposed professional development project is the level of collaboration among participants. A facilitator cannot force a teacher to participate in terms of speaking, collaborating, sharing, and reflecting. It will be important to inspire teachers to want to collaborate by making the time together purposeful and meaningful. Establishing norms and goals during the first session may help address this potential barrier. A final potential barrier is the concern that teachers will not be willing to be vulnerable during peer and video observations. For most teachers at the local school, observing and videoing each other will seem intimidating or out of their comfort zone. An environment of trust will need to be established early on to encourage teachers to be vulnerable.

Roles and Responsibilities of Participants

Participants will be expected to attend all nine professional development sessions and complete the assignments from week to week in order to truly engage in the learning process and take away valuable information to positively impact writing instruction. Additionally, participation and engagement during each session will be a vital component to learning outcomes as a grade level. Willingness to be vulnerable and collaborate with peers both in the meeting and during classroom observations will also add to the learning success of the professional development. I will facilitate the professional development each week and will provide all necessary materials needed to successfully complete the tasks. The professional development administrator along with the grade level administrator will attend all sessions to provide support through conversation and planning.

Teachers in the school system are required to attend 20 hours of training each school year to maintain an active teaching certificate in the county. These professional development hours are documented through an individualized online database by the teachers. Each week will provide one hour of training for teachers that can be counted toward the required 20 hours. Teachers will need to log these hours on their own time. I will provide a summary sheet for teachers at the conclusion of the 9 weeks professional development that includes dates and times to assist with the logging of information.

Project Evaluation Plan

Introduction

It is important to evaluate any process or experience in education to receive feedback on the effectiveness of the final outcome, (Fink, 2009). When constructing a pre and post survey for my proposed professional development, I considered all aspects of the learning that will take

place throughout the professional development as well as prior knowledge that may be needed to successfully learn throughout the process. Through the review of the literature on types of professional development, the most effective studies included a pre and post survey of participants. Results from participants in the Croft et al. (2010) study revealed that JEPD was most effective when school administrators and instructional coaches were present and involved in the collaboration process. Additionally, Nolan and Hoover (2004) presented survey results through an open-ended response survey where participants noted positive experiences and personal growth when training was job-embedded with students in their classroom. After analyzing model surveys, I decided to use a combination of open-ended and rating scale questions to gain insight on participants' experiences throughout the professional development for writing instruction. The rating scale is based on an ordinal method or organization where participants one of a set number of categories in a specific order to express their opinion on the question (Fink, 2009). The open-ended portion of the survey will promote reflection and engagement of participants as well as they must reflect on their current level of knowledge and practice (Fink, 2009). The knowledge attained through the surveys will allow me as the facilitator to differentiate the professional development to meet the needs of all educators involved. In addition, the survey will reflect an unbiased view of the professional development and can be adapted by any facilitator to meet the needs of a local school, participants, and overall learning outcomes.

Goals

The goal of administering a pre survey for this professional development project is to assess current levels of knowledge of participants on Common Core writing standards. Additional goals are reflected through other questions in the survey which include the comfort

level of participants to collaborate with colleagues, observe peers, and participate in video observations. Answers to these questions will allow the facilitator to address any concerns regarding collaborating and observing. Varying levels of encouragement and engagement may be present based on the answers to the pre survey. The post survey serves as a follow up to the pre survey as questions remain the same. The facilitator will determine growth in knowledge of common core standards and levels of collaboration based on participants' responses. The goal of the participant is to see a significant growth in learning through answer responses. An additional reflection section is included on the post survey to promote open-ended reflection of the professional development. The goal of the open-ended responses is to gain a deeper insight of participants' thoughts of the impact believed to have been made by the learning. Inspiration for further research and professional development may also result in the outcome of the post survey reflection.

Project Implications

The ultimate goal of teaching and learning is to positively impact student achievement. With writing instruction and student performance in writing being areas of concern for participants for quite some time, it is time for change to occur. In order to change instructional practices, a change in mindset must occur first. New teachers along with veteran teachers have seen a shift in the instructional expectations in writing since the majority of the United States has shifted from NCLB to CCSS. Knowing this is mandated has caused pressure to rise in teachers at all levels. Pressures and concerns were expressed by participants through the interviews of this project. The proposed professional development on effective writing instruction can potentially remove barriers of fear and encourage teachers to learn from one another in an environment of trust and collaboration. Teachers will learn from one another through observations and video and

establish best practices in writing instruction. As teachers analyze student work together, they will have the opportunity to celebrate strengths and grow from the knowledge each possesses as they begin to take ownership of all students. Owning responsibility for more than just the students in a single classroom can enhance the sense of community at the local school (Knight, 2009). Growing communities can promote social change as teachers grow through the reflective practice of professional development. Ongoing professional development training is recommended to ensure that teachers are learning current research-based strategies in writing instruction and are allowed ample opportunities to implement these strategies and reflect on their practice.

Local stakeholders including school administrators and district level language arts leaders may be impacted by this professional development if student achievement is positively impacted based on the outcomes of the professional development learning. Student achievement in writing can be measured by classroom assessments, district level benchmarks, and the state end of year assessment. Teachers will benefit from this professional development by gaining knowledge on research-based writing strategies and ways to successfully implement these strategies, both factors that were discussed in participant interviews. Teachers will also have time set aside to discuss writing strategies and student work. Students will benefit as well since they will be receiving the instruction and provided with research-based writing strategies to contribute to their success in writing. Writing is embedded in all content areas and can potentially contribute to additional success in math, science, social studies, and reading as well.

Conclusion

Section 3 included a project rationale, project description, project evaluation plan, and project implications. An extensive scholarly review of literature related to the professional

development genre of the project was also included. Based on themes generated from interview responses, the review of literature for the project focused on three themes: CCSS writing standards and effective instructional strategies, types of professional development, and differentiated instruction. As a result, job-embedded professional development evolved as the most appropriate professional development model for my proposed project. Effective professional learning is job-embedded, collaborative, and realistic to teaching and learning (Killion & Roy, 2009). CCSS in writing were used to drive each session of the professional development while collaboration and reflection amongst teachers addressed differentiated instruction. Quality curricula is produced when a teacher accurately understands the nature of the content the curriculum will represent. Standards and textbooks do not fulfill a curriculum, yet are merely ingredients necessary for developing a truly differentiated curriculum (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010). Teachers must view standards and textbooks as two out of many resources to consider when planning for a differentiated curriculum.

Section four will outline the project's strengths and limitations as well as recommendations for alternative approaches. I will also share how the project promotes scholarship, leadership, and change. Reflection on the importance of my work and what was learned through the project development will also be shared. Finally, I will provide implications, applications, and directions for future research.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand elementary teachers' lived experiences with writing instruction—their use of effective instructional strategies in writing instruction and their ability to motivate students to become successful writers. The following section includes the discussion of strengths and limitations of a JEPD project designed to enhance and improve writing instruction in grades 3-5. Recommendations for alternative approaches based on strengths, limitations, and the overall experience of the project are presented along with suggestions for future research. Additionally, scholarship awareness and learning is described in relation to my own experience in developing my research and how this led to the development of the project. Three topics—leadership change, importance of my work, and a final reflection—concludes the study.

Project Strengths and Limitations

The project study shows four strengths as it is embedded in research-based strategies and is teacher-centered: (a) job-embedded practices that encourage best practices in teaching and learning, (b) analysis and application of standards as they align to district expectations, (c) teacher reflection, and (d) the involvement of many stakeholders. Job-embedded practices were used to ensure that the project is realistic and purposeful for a variety of school settings. The project encourages teachers to collaborate using standards, student work, assessments, and research-based strategies to meet local school and district requirements. Collaborative professional learning is effective when teachers focus on teaching, curriculum, assessment, and leadership (Reeves, 2010). Teachers will examine standards to determine exactly what students are expected to learn. Once standards have been properly analyzed, lessons will be designed

collaboratively based on the needs of each individual classroom. Student work through the form of common assessments will be analyzed within each grade level planning to determine strengths and weaknesses of standards and instruction. Teachers will have the opportunity to be reflective in their practice by observing themselves as well as colleagues. Costa and Kallick (2009) suggested that "thinking about thinking" (p. 10) is a metacognitive habit that teachers can use to reflect on and evaluate teaching practices. By modeling methods of collaboration for teachers, this professional development will generate positive habits that can be embedded in teachers' jobs daily.

Another strength of this project is the participation of many stakeholders. In addition to teachers in grades 3-5, administrators and instructional coaches will be present for each professional development session. These stakeholders will contribute to the discussion and to the unfolding of needs of students as seen in data and classroom observations. The implementation of collaborative professional development that embeds continuous improvement at the school and classroom level is beneficial to all students. Stakeholders will feel a sense of responsibility and ownership of all students as they work together to improve writing instruction and student achievement in writing.

Finally, the proposed project provides resources and strategies that teachers can continue to use after the professional development is deemed complete as they collaborate with grade level colleagues. Analyzing standards will be essential to the success of teaching and learning from one semester to the next. Self-observations along with peer observations and the use of the observation guide will continue to cultivate an environment of trust, collaboration, and reflection. The protocols used for discussion along with the lesson plan template will ensure that teaching is intentional and standards-based.

This project is subject to two limitations. The greatest limitation of this project is time and an understanding of priorities throughout the school. Teachers will participate in the professional development for 1 hour, 1 day a week. In the event that other topics arise that must be presented or discussed during planning, the professional development time will be limited. In the past, a variety of school leaders in the areas of technology and media have interrupted planning time. Administrators can assist with this limitation by communicating to other stakeholders in the school that this time is to remain sacred and uninterrupted in all cases possible. Professional development pertaining to the project will take precedence over all topics during the nine week period of time.

Another limitation includes scheduling. If teachers are going to spend adequate time observing another colleague, schedules may need to be rearranged to allow for proper timing and recording of writing lessons. Perhaps a schedule can be made that all teachers can have access to and prepare in advance for observations.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

Gaps in writing instruction along with student achievement in writing have been present at my local school for the past 5 years. Many strategies have been implemented, book studies have been conducted, and county representatives have facilitated sessions on writing instructional strategies, but writing data that has been collected has not shown improvement over time. Killion and Roy (2009) claimed that, "Students achieve more when teams of educators within a school and across a district engage in continuous cycles of improvement that focus their attention on their learning needs and refining their practice" (p. 5). Continuous cycles of improvement must occur and re-occur to continuously evaluate teaching and learning.

In addition to the job-embedded professional development project, explicit teaching of specific writing crafts can be modeled by the school's literacy instructional coach to improve best practices. Grade levels can take professional development and learning teams a step further by carrying out lesson studies. Through lesson studies, teachers will develop a deeper understanding of pedagogy and content as they make public their work usually done in isolation behind closed doors. Teachers will observe through classroom observations of themselves and peers how instructional decisions influence success (Reeves, 2010). Lesson studies can also include the observation of instructional coaches modeling isolated writing skills. By combining methods of professional development, teachers will forever learn and grow in continuous cycles of improvement.

Scholarship, Project Development, and Leadership Change

Through extensive research and self-discovery, I was able to see my project study evolve in many ways. Peer-reviewed journals allowed me to take a closer look at the level of scholarship expectation and project development of others as I formulated my own thinking and interests. Ultimately, this research and discovery led to my own growth as a leader.

Scholarship

My own scholarship greatly evolved throughout the design of my study. After receiving feedback from doctoral chairs, I learned to regard reflection as my greatest tool. With each edit came new understandings, experiences, and values. As I began to confirm my study through the proposal stage, I owned my study and felt full responsibility to see it through. As I gathered references throughout my study, I quickly learned that scholarship is ever-changing. New studies were published often that would confirm or warrant change for my own. Additionally, I learned the power of perseverance as completing a doctoral study has been no easy feat. I have had to

persevere through countless revisions, levels of questioning, and ongoing data analysis. Perseverance from this experience will contribute to my ongoing quest of being a life-long learner.

Project Development

I began this process with an obscured view of the true purpose and direction I wanted my study to take. I knew that I wanted to research current practices in writing instruction and gain a deeper insight on teacher perspectives in their ability to teach writing. I hoped that my project would evolve into a handbook-like product that would help new teachers effectively teach differentiated writing strategies to students. After extensive research and analysis of data, my project study evolved into more than just a concern for new teachers. Data revealed that challenges in writing instruction are present among all types of teachers, novice and veteran, due to a lack of training in pre-service teacher programs, local professional development, and training in specific strategies. Research from peer-reviewed journals led me down a variety of avenues as I gathered data, strategies, and implications for my own research. As I discovered studies with similar topics as my own, most did not evaluate teachers' experiences but rather looked at student data and classroom observations. I felt as if a phenomenological study provided me with genuine first-hand experiences of teachers currently in the classroom. The information shared by teacher participants led to my design of a professional development in writing instruction that focused on collaboration and differentiation using research-based strategies.

Leadership and Change

The proposed project study is intended to refine writing instruction for teachers with all levels of experiences while promoting collaboration and developing teacher leaders. Administrative leaders as well as instructional coaches and grade level leaders must support the

professional development in order to encourage teachers to commit to the work. The facilitator of the writing professional development will promote change as practices are refined, student work is analyzed, and changes are made to positively impact student achievement. Long-term effects should be seen in the mastery of common core writing standards due to the closing of gaps that are possible when carrying out this staff development.

Change is often seen as intimidating for a school, especially when instruction is involved. Teachers believe change to bring additional work, confusion, and division among colleagues; however, when presented with meaning and purpose, change can be highly effective (Knight, 2009). Changing the way teachers think and plan for writing instruction will have a ripple effect in other content areas as well. Common core lays the foundation for true integration of standards so teachers are able to go deeper in content. Differentiated instruction will also contribute to the success of standard mastery. Change will be required but will produce timely results as grade levels meet weekly to reflect and plan collaboratively on a weekly basis.

Reflection on the Importance of the Work

The importance of my work has become more evident throughout my research, personal reflection, and experiences with participants. When I originally began with my problem statement, I had a concern for the decline in writing achievement at my local school but did not know if it was at all possible for me to make a difference. After listening to my colleagues through numerous interviews, I was able to understand the essence of the problem. A lack of training in writing instruction for both novice and veteran teachers was having a negative impact on student achievement. The analysis of my data revealed this lack of training as well as the need for research-based writing strategies to support the new writing common core strategies.

Teachers also shared concerns in the lack of time to collaborate and the confusion of differentiated instruction.

My professional development project for writing instruction takes teachers in grades kindergarten through 5 through a professional development cycle where they plan, do, check, and then act. Teachers will plan collaboratively by analyzing writing standards and creating common assessments. They will then act by carrying out instruction based on the planning. In the process of instructing, teachers will have opportunities to observe their colleagues teaching in action as well as video themselves. Teachers will check progress by analyzing student data and student work to determine remediation, acceleration, and enrichment needs of students. Finally, teachers will act by adjusting instruction to meet the learning needs of students. I firmly believe that this ongoing cycle will ensure the success of student achievement in writing and allow teachers to continuously refine their writing instruction. Through my research and work in this study, I have learned that the greatest strategy and resource is the human mind. All teachers have positive intentions when working with students so we must allow educators to collaborate with one another on an ongoing basis to discuss strengths, challenges, and best practices as they arise in job-embedded settings.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

The proposed professional development project and the overall research embedded in this study is intended to have a positive impact on writing instruction and student achievement in writing at my local school. Positive social change can occur among teachers within each grade level as they collaborate, plan, reflect, and analyze writing data to determine the most effective research-based strategies to implement in writing instruction. Since writing is an essential skill in all content areas, it is assumed that social change will be apparent in other content areas as well

as students write across the curriculum. Stakeholders who will experience the change include teachers and students in grades kindergarten through fifth, instructional coaches, support staff, and administration. The instructional coaches at the school collaborate with three other elementary schools in the same cluster by participating in vertical teams, content area support groups, and instructional training. By sharing the work of the writing professional development model, other cluster schools and stakeholders may benefit from its success as well.

Recommendations for practice include flexibility and follow through. Just as students practice resiliency and need differentiated instruction, teachers will respond best to the professional development learning when instruction is tailored to their specific needs as a grade level or individual classroom. Even though the project includes a suggested timeline, adjustments may be needed from week to week to solidify the purpose and make the most of its meaning. Tasks suggested within each week may take longer to complete as well. Flexibility in the time spent on each task will need to be determined by the facilitator. Follow through will be critical to this professional development from start to finish. If work is left undone, unaccounted for, or not valued as meaningful, the purpose will be lost. The facilitator can work with administrators to set goals and schedules and make these clear to all participants.

This study can be extended and adapted in a variety of settings that warrant future research. Other professional development models are worth considering such as professional learning communities and lesson studies. Both of these take similar approaches to looking at standards, student work, and reflecting on teaching practices as they achieve a common goal. However, the structure of these models is more detailed and less flexible than the proposed job-embedded model in this study.

Conclusion

As I reflect on this journey, I feel an overwhelming sense of accomplishment. I have grown as a scholar, educator, and individual. Although the project study has been no easy feat, the work and implications have been far beyond rewarding. I plan to present the project to the administrators and instructional coaches at my school in hopes that they will adopt the professional development project in the near future. In the event the school chooses to carry out the professional development, my goal is to help facilitate to share the knowledge and expertise that I have gained through this process to address the challenges in writing instruction at the school where I work. The problem statement and rationale focused on the concern for student achievement in writing due to new mandates from common core standards as well as the increased level of rigor brought about through these standards. The study also focused on the concerns of teachers in regards to lack of training in writing instruction. After confirming these concerns through the phenomenological study, I feel that the project will address the problem and offer methods to improve writing instruction and student achievement in writing through effective professional development for teachers.

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Appendix A: The Project: Supporting Teachers in Effective Writing Instruction

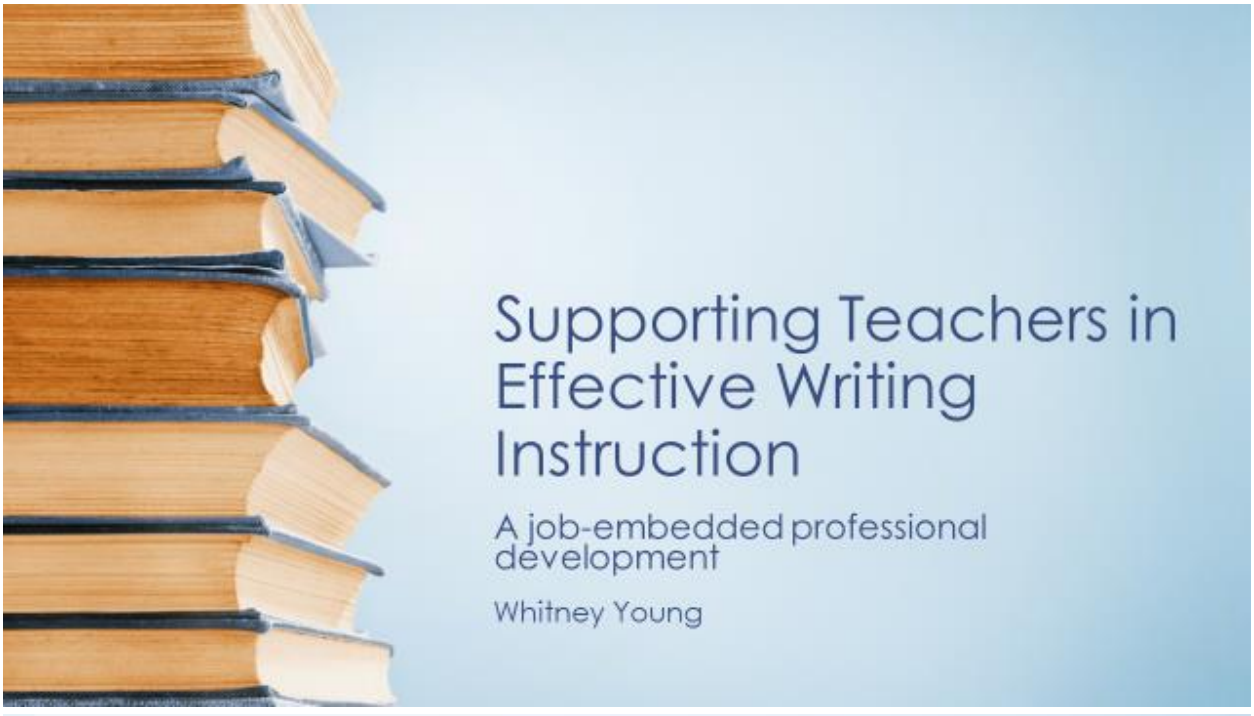
Timetable for Professional Development Project Study

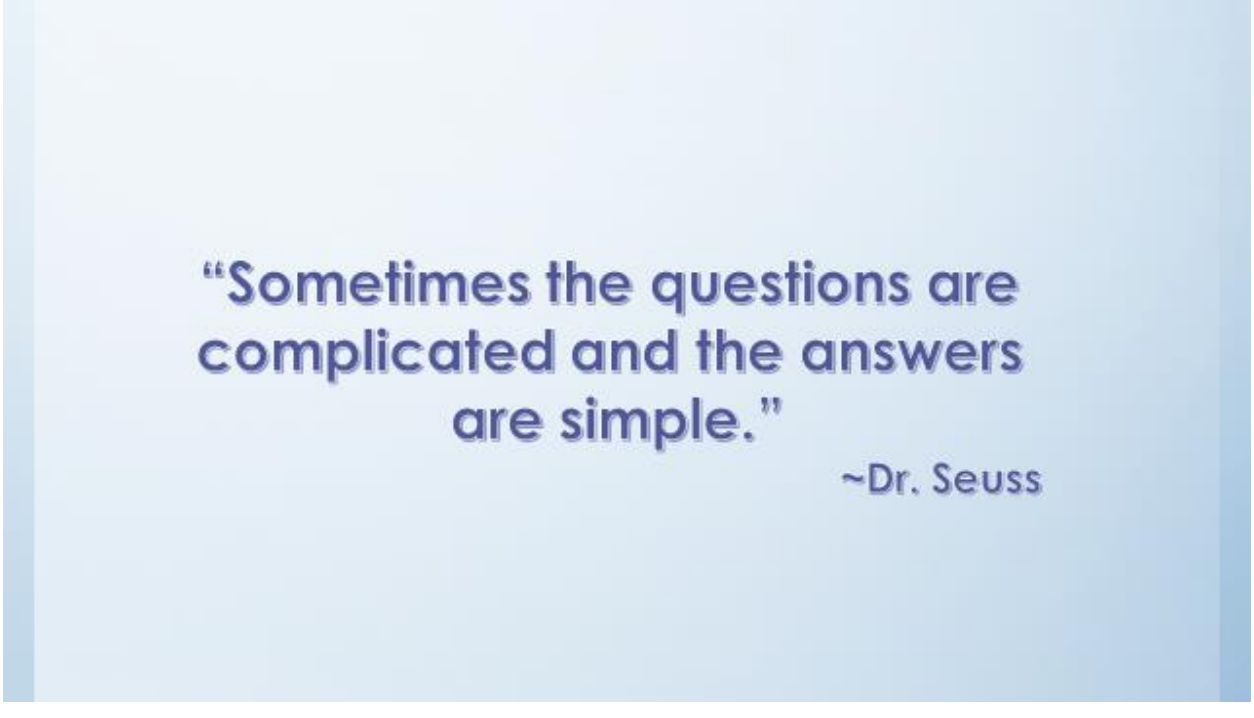
Week 1	Overview of Professional Development Power Point Presentation: Overview of Job-Embedded Professional Development, determine individual stage of concern and current level of use Share goals for the professional development work together over the next 9 weeks. Create norms. Introduce standards of focus. Teacher survey of standards to assess current level of knowledge. Administer professional development journals to each teacher (this can be as simple as a composition notebook) where teachers will records reflections, observations, and resources.
Week 2	New Learning: Writing Standard**:** Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.2). Handout: Research-based Instructional Strategies for Writing Handout: Differentiated Writing Instruction Around the World Protocol: Teachers collaborate to discuss the writing standard, determine appropriate research-based strategies for teaching and modeling the standard, include student engagement and differentiation strategies. Handout: Analyzing Standards, this will be used to break down the standard for the week and determine the work for the lesson plan. Develop a lesson plan as a grade level using the lesson plan template. Call to Action: Teachers will teach and facilitate the lesson based on the lesson created together during today's session. Teachers will bring written notes that address the effectiveness of the research-based strategy used, whether or not students were actively engaged in the lesson, and how the differentiation informed the lesson for the following day.
Week 3	Reflection of Writing Standard: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.2). How effective was the lesson? How did students respond to the strategy used in the direct instruction? Analyze Next Standard: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.4).

	Teachers work in pairs to develop a lesson for the new standard, using research-based strategies and methods for differentiation. Pairs will share lesson plan ideas. Call to Action: The two teachers who worked together to develop a lesson plan and will combine classes. One will teach the lesson while the other takes notes using the Observation Guide on the research strategy used, the level of active student engagement, and the method of differentiation used during instruction. Each teacher will need to bring at least one sample of student work from this lesson to the professional development session next week.
Week 4	Reflection and Analysis of Student Work Teachers who partnered together last week will share their observations of the lesson they developed together and will determine the lesson's effectiveness with students. Analyze student work using the ATLAS protocol Analyze Next Standard: Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.5). Call to Action: Create lesson plans for next week using the analyzing standards template and handouts from session 2. Bring student work to the next session.
Week 5	Reflection and Analysis of Student Work Analyze student work using the ATLAS protocol. Reevaluate research-based strategies: Are some more effective than others thus far? Differentiation: Is this proving to be successful? How do we know? Analyze Next Standard: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.7). Call to Action: Create lesson plans for next week using the analyzing standards template and handouts from session 2. Bring student work to the next session. Option: Teachers can choose to partner with a teacher and video each other teaching one of the writing lessons planned during today's session. Partners may bring this video to the session next week to view and analyze in terms of student engagement and differentiated instruction.
Week 6	Reflection and Analysis of Student Work Analyze student work using the ATLAS protocol. Analyze videos if teachers chose this option. Use Observation Guide. Analyze Next Standard: Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.8). Call to Action: Create lesson plans for next week using the analyzing standards template and handouts from session 2. Bring student work to the next session.

	Option: Teachers can choose to partner with a teacher and video each other teaching one of the writing lessons planned during today's session. Partners may bring this video to the session next week to view and analyze in terms of student engagement and differentiated instruction.
Week 7	Reflection and Analysis of Student Work Analyze student work using the ATLAS protocol. Analyze videos if teachers chose this option. Use observation guide. Analyze Next Standard: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.9). Call to Action: Create lesson plans for next week using the analyzing standards template and handouts from session 2. Bring student work to the next session. Suggestion: Teachers can create a common assessment during their other collaborative planning day this week to assess the informational writing standards through a culminating task. Option: Teachers can choose to partner with a teacher and video each other teaching one of the writing lessons planned during today's session. Partners may bring this video to the session next week to view and analyze in terms of student engagement and differentiated instruction.
Week 8	Reflection and Analysis of Student Work Analyze student work using the ATLAS protocol. Analyze videos if teachers chose this option. Use observation guide. Analyze Next Standard: Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.10). Call to Action: Create lesson plans for next week using the analyzing standards template and handouts from session 2. Bring student work to the next session. Option: Teachers can choose to partner with a teacher and video each other teaching one of the writing lessons planned during today's session. Partners may bring this video to the session next week to view and analyze in terms of student engagement and differentiated instruction.
Week 9	Reflection and Analysis of Student Work Analyze student work using the ATLAS protocol. Analyze videos if teachers chose this option. Use observation guide. Analyze informational writing common assessment if one was created and administered. Post-Survey and Reflection

PowerPoint Presentation





Sample Norms

- Participate
- Listen well
- Respect each other's opinion
- Know that it is alright to disagree
- Be on time
- Come prepared
- Work collaboratively

Job-Embedded Professional Development

- Easily accessible to all teachers
- Promotes common planning
- Fosters collaboration
- Builds trusting relationships
- Encourages reflection
- Provides opportunities for peer observations
- Analysis of student work
- Common goal
- Engages teachers
- Open communication
- Enhances teacher performance
- Positively impacts students achievement

Goals for Our Work Together

- Identify concerns of current student performance
- Identify the instructional needs of teachers in the grade level
- Analyze writing standards
  - Determine what students should be able to know and do
- Brainstorm methods for differentiated writing instruction
- Reflect and refine our practice
  - Paired observations

Projected Outcomes

- Heightened confidence in teachers' ability to teach writing
- Deeper understanding of Common Core Writing Standards
- Deeper understanding of appropriate strategies for differentiation
- An increase in student performance in writing
- Strengthened collaboration amongst grade level teams
- A sense of ownership and shared responsibility of all students

Outline for Professional Development

Week	Topic	Materials	Assignment
1	Overview, Standards, Protocols, Pre-Survey	Please bring a pen or pencil.	Review standards for 9 weeks
2	Research-based strategies, differentiated instruction, plan	Journal, pen or pencil, standards	Teach lesson on standard 2
3	Reflection and analysis of writing standards, plan	Journal, pen or pencil, standards	Teach lesson on standard 4
4	Reflection and analysis of writing standards, plan	Journal, pen or pencil, standards	Teach lesson on standard 5, video optional
5	Reflection and analysis of writing standards and student work, plan	Journal, pen or pencil, standards	Teach lesson on standard 7
6	Reflection and analysis of writing standards and student work, plan	Journal, pen or pencil, standards	Teach lesson on standard 8
7	Reflection and analysis of writing standards and student work, plan	Journal, pen or pencil, standards	Teach lesson on standard 9
8	Reflection and analysis of writing standards and student work, plan	Journal, pen or pencil, standards	Teach lesson on standard 10, common assessment
9	Reflection and analysis of observations, common assessment, culminating activity, post-survey	Journal, pen or pencil	Continue to collaborate together using protocols and job-embedded strategies

Stages of Concern: Where are you?

Stage of Concern	Description
Stage 0: Awareness	Heard about professional development, doesn't care to learn more
Stage 1: Information	Wants to know more information
Stage 2: Personal	Wants to know how professional development will affect him/her
Stage 3: Management	Wants to know how to manage time and resources
Stage 4: Consequence	Analyzes impact of professional development on teaching practice and student learning
Stage 5: Collaboration	Wants to engage with others to share learning and experiences
Stage 6: Refocusing	Reflects and refines own collaborative learning skills

Killion, J. & Roy, P. (2009). *Becoming a learning school*. New Jersey: National Staff Development Council.

Levels of Use: Where are you?

Level of Use	Description
Level 0: Non-Use	No interest shown in the innovation; no action taken
Level 1: Orientation	Begins to gather information on the innovation
Level 2: Preparation	Begins to plan ways to implement the innovation
Level 3: Mechanical	Concerned about the basics of the implementation
Level 4: Routine/Refinement	Becoming comfortable with the innovations and implements as taught in the professional development
Level 5: Integration	Integrates innovation with other initiatives and collaborates well with others
Level 6: Renewal	Explore new ways to implement and improve the innovation

Hord, S. & Rutherford, W. (1987). Taking charge of change. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Video Resources for Professional Development Learning

- Looking at student work:
  - www.annenburginsttute.org
- Professional development for increased student learning:
  - www.schoolimprovement.com
- Looking at teacher work and standards in practice:
  - www.collaborativecommunications.com

Killion, J. & Roy, P. (2009). *Becoming a learning school*. New Jersey: National Staff Development Council.

Pre-Professional Development of Effective Writing Strategies Teacher Survey

Directions: Please read each standard and determine your current level of knowledge of the standard by circling one of the numbers with 1 meaning, "very little knowledge and have yet to implement in the classroom" to 5 meaning, "highly knowledgeable and fully implement in the classroom."

Standard	Level of Knowledge of the Standard
Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.2).	1 2 3 4 5
Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.4).	1 2 3 4 5
Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.5).	1 2 3 4 5
Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.7).	1 2 3 4 5
Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the	1 2 3 4 5

information while avoiding plagiarism (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.8).	
Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.9).	1 2 3 4 5
Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.10).	1 2 3 4 5

Directions: Please read each question and determine your level of comfort with the topic at question by circling one of the numbers, 1 meaning "highly uncomfortable" to 5 meaning, "highly comfortable."

1. Co-teaching with a colleague on my grade level.

   1 2 3 4 5

2. Observing a colleague teach.

   1 2 3 4 5

3. Having a colleague observe me teach.

   1 2 3 4 5

4. Videotaping myself as I teach.

   1 2 3 4 5

5. Collaborating with colleagues on my grade level.

   1 2 3 4 5

6. Currently, which stage of concern do you align with in regards to writing instruction? Circle one. Please refer back to your power point notes for a description of each.

0: Awareness	1: Information	2: Personal
3: Management	4: Consequence	5: Collaboration
6: Refocusing		

7. Currently, which level of use do you align with in regards to writing instruction? Circle one. Please refer back to your power point notes for a description of each.

0: Non-use	1: Orientation	2: Preparation
3: Mechanical	4: Routine/Refinement	5: Integration
6: Renewal		

Research-Based Writing Instructional Strategies

The following resources offer research-based strategies in writing when analyzing standards, creating assessments, and planning for instruction. It is suggested that you not limit resources to the ones below.

Online Resources

http://www.unitsofstudy.com/

http://culhamwriting.com/

http://www.thedailycafe.com/

http://www.the2sisters.com/theDaily5.html

http://educationnorthwest.org/traits

http://www.nwp.org/

Text Resources

6 + 1 Traits of Writing: The Complete Guide for the Primary Grades

Ruth Culham

6 + 1 Traits of Writing: The Complete Guide Grades 3 and Up

Ruth Culham

Best Practices in Writing Instruction, Second Edition

Steve Graham and Charles A. MacArthur

Close Reading and Writing from Sources

Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey

Common Core for the Not-So-Common Learner, Grades K-5: English Language Arts Strategies

Maria G. Dove and Andrea M. Honigsfeld

High-Impact Writing Clinics: 20 Projectable Lessons for Building Literacy Across Content Areas

Sara Holbrook and Michael Salinger

Mapping Comprehensive Units to the ELA Common Core Standards, K-5

Kathy Tuchman Glass

Notebook Know How: *Strategies for the Writer's Notebook*

Aimee Buckner

Pathways to the Common Core: Accelerating Achievement

Lucy Calkins, Mary Ehrenworth, and Christopher Lehman

Scaffolded Writing Instruction: Teaching With a Gradual-Release Framework

Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey

Teaching Common Core English Language Arts Standards: 20 Lesson Frameworks for Elementary Grades

Patricia M. Cunningham and James W. Cunningham

The Best-Kept Teaching Secret: How Written Conversations Engage Kids, Activate Learning, Grow Fluent Writers
Harvey "Smokey" A. Daniels and Elaine Daniels
The Common Core Writing Book, K-5: Lessons for a Range of Tasks, Purposes, and Audiences
Gretchen Owocki
The Daily 5: Fostering Literacy in the Elementary Grades, Second Edition
Gail Boushey and Joan Moser
Uncommon Core: Where the Authors of the Standards Go Wrong About Instruction-and How You Can Get It Right
Michael W. Smith and Deborah Appleman
Write Like This: Teaching Real-World Writing Through Modeling and Mentor Texts
Kelly Gallagher

Differentiated Instructional Strategies

The following resources offer research-based strategies in differentiated instruction when working with elementary students. It is suggested that you not limit resources to the ones below.

Online Resources

http://www.edutopia.org/blog/differentiated-instruction-strategies-pbl-andrew-miller
http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/article/what-differentiated-instruction
http://education.ky.gov/educational/diff/Documents/StrategiesThatDifferentiateInstruction4.12.pdf

Text Resources

The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Learners, Second Edition
Carol Ann Tomlinson
Differentiation and the Brain: How Neuroscience Supports the Learner-Friendly Classroom
David A. Sousa and Carol Ann Tomlinson
Differentiation in Action: A Complete Resource With Research-Supported Strategies to Help You Plan and Organize
Judith Dodge
Making Differentiation a Habit: How to Ensure Success in Academically Diverse Classrooms
Diane Heacox
Differentiation That Really Works (Grades 3-5): Strategies from Real Teachers for Real Classrooms
Cheryll Adams and Rebecca Pierce
Making the Most of Small Groups: Differentiation for All
Debbie Diller
Leading and Managing a Differentiated Classroom
Carol Ann Tomlinson and Marcia B. Imbeau

The World Café Protocol

The *World Café Discussion Protocol* is used to discuss a topic or various topics to create a network of collaborative dialogue. The leadership role rotates to promote collaboration amongst a common group of people. The result of the protocol is a clear understanding of the topic at hand. The steps below provide one way to carry out a World Café.

Steps

1. Form groups of 3 or 4.
2. Each group selects a leader.
3. The leader's role is to record the major points of the conversation that takes place at the table and to then summarize the conversation.
4. The group discusses the topic at hand until time is called. Groups can be discussing the same topic or related topics.
5. The leader stays put; the rest of the group rotates to the next table.
6. The leader now presents a summary of the conversation recorded from the previous group to the new group.
7. Each table selects a new leader.
8. The new leader's role is to record the major points of the conversation that takes place at the table and to then summarize the conversation using the recorded notes.
9. The group discusses the topic at hand until time is called.
10. Repeat the process until all participants have had a chance to lead.
11. After the final round, the last group of leaders present to the whole group.

Analyzing the Standard

Standard:

Knowledge Targets	**Reasoning Targets**	**Skill Targets**	**Outcome Targets**
What do students need to know?	How are students using knowledge to solve a problem, make a decision, etc.? Beyond recall, what cognitive demand is required?	What must students be able to do? How are students using knowledge and reasoning to perform a task? Is an actual demonstration required in order to assess mastery?	What are students asked to create or produce?

I Can Statements
"I can _____"
"This means I can _____"

Lesson Plan Template

Standard of Focus:

	Time	Materials Needed	Notes	Reflection
Opening/ Engagement				
Mini Lesson				
Guided Practice				
Independent Practice				
Differentiation				
Other				

Observation Guide

Actions to take when observing:

- Makes notes on individual students and the conversations you hear, be sure to write down the first names of students
- Note situations where students are collaborating or choose not to collaborate
- Look for and record examples of how students construct their understanding through a variety of discussions and activities
- Note the methods students use to solve problems, including errors they make and how they react or reflect on these errors
- Document ways the teacher is differentiating instruction, including small group, whole group, and individual instruction

Questions to consider when observing:

1. Was the goal clear? Did the supporting activities effectively contribute to achieving the goal?

2. Did the organization of the lesson flow in a way that students understood the concept?

3. Did classroom discussion and collaboration help promote student understanding?

4. Did the content of the lesson align to the standard intended?

5. Were students able to apply background knowledge to enhance their understanding of the content?

6. Did the teacher's questions facilitate and engage student-centered thinking?

7. Were student ideas and responses valued and incorporated in the lesson?

8. Was the lesson summary consistent with the lesson goal?

9. How might the lesson be re-taught or enhanced to accommodate for a variety of learners and their needs?
10. How well did the lesson align to the plans constructed during professional development time?

ATLAS Protocol

Learning from Data is a tool to guide groups of teachers discovering what students, educators, and the public understands and how they are thinking. The tool, developed by Eric Buchovecky, is based in part on the work of the Leadership for Urban Mathematics Project and of the Assessment Communities of Teachers Project. The tool also draws on the work of Steve Seidel and Evangeline Harris-Stefanakis of Project Zero at Harvard University. Revised November 2000 by Gene Thompson-Grove for NSRF. Revised August 2004 for Looking at Data by Dianne Leahy. Below is a summarized version of the protocol.

The purpose of the ATLAS protocol is to support teachers in analyzing student work to guide instructional decisions. The protocol can take up to 60 minutes or more to complete. To begin the protocol, group norms should be reviewed and a secretary should be appointed to record discussion points. The facilitator introduces the work to be discussed then the team spends approximately 10 minutes analyzing the work. The next round consists in a group discussion, perhaps round-robin style, where teachers call out what they see in the work. All judgements should remain unsaid as this is simply looking at facts. This round should take at least 10 minutes. Round three includes interpretation of the work based on inferences made during the analysis. Finally, teachers will determine what the implications are for teaching and learning moving forward based on the present assessment. Follow up questions may also be used to help continue the process of data analysis. It is suggested that debriefing take place after the process to determine success, areas of growth, and reflect on mindset.

Summarized with permission from the National School Reform Faculty® (2015). Atlas: looking at data. The protocol in its entirety along with other protocols can be found at http://www.nsrfharmony.org/system/files/protocols/atlas_looking_data_0.pdf

Post-Professional Development of Effective Writing Strategies Teacher Survey

Directions: Please read each standard and determine your current level of knowledge of the standard by circling one of the numbers with 1 meaning, "very little knowledge and have yet to implement in the classroom" to 5 meaning, "highly knowledgeable and fully implement in the classroom."

Standard	Level of Knowledge of the Standard
Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.2).	1 2 3 4 5
Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.4).	1 2 3 4 5
Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.5).	1 2 3 4 5
Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.7).	1 2 3 4 5
Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy	

of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.8).	1 2 3 4 5
Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.9).	1 2 3 4 5
Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.10).	1 2 3 4 5

Directions: Please read each question and determine your level of comfort with the topic at question by circling one of the numbers, 1 meaning "highly uncomfortable" to 5 meaning, "highly comfortable."

1. Co-teaching with a colleague on my grade level.

   1 2 3 4 5

2. Observing a colleague teach.

   1 2 3 4 5

3. Having a colleague observe me teach.

   1 2 3 4 5

4. Videotaping myself as I teach.

   1 2 3 4 5

5. Collaborating with colleagues on my grade level.

1 2 3 4 5

Professional Development of Effective Writing Strategies Teacher Reflection

1. How has this professional development added to your knowledge of common core standards in writing?

   _____

   _____

   _____

2. How has this professional development impacted the writing instruction in your classroom?

   _____

   _____

   _____

3. What recommendations do you have for the overall experience of this professional development?

   _____

   _____

   _____

4. In terms of your levels of use chart you analyzed at the beginning of this professional development, what level do you feel you are at now that you have completed the professional development?

   _____

   _____

   _____

5. If you have grown in your levels of use, what aspect of this professional development do you feel had the greatest impact on your writing instruction? If you have not grown in your levels of use,

please explain what is lacking in the way of the professional support that can be changed to better meet your needs.

_____

_____

_____

6. What instructional support in writing do you feel you will need in the future in order to continue to grow in your levels of use?

_____

_____

_____

7. Currently, which stage of concern do you align with in regards to writing instruction? Circle one. Please refer back to your power point notes for a description of each.

0: Awareness	1: Information	2: Personal
3: Management	4: Consequence	5: Collaboration

6: Refocusing

8. Currently, which level of use do you align with in regards to writing instruction? Circle one. Please refer back to your power point notes for a description of each.

0: Non-use	1: Orientation	2: Preparation
3: Mechanical	4: Routine/Refinement	5: Integration

Appendix B: Individual Interview Guide

Research Questions

1. How do teachers perceive the impact of the CCSS writing standards on their current writing instructional practices?

2. What do teachers feel they need in order to provide effective writing instruction that supports the CCSS writing expectations?

Interviewer: Whitney Young	Interview Date:
Participant:	Interview Time:
Grade Level:	Years of teaching experience:

Interview Guide:

Guiding Question: How do you feel that the knowledge acquired through training and experiences in the classroom affect your ability to provide effective writing instruction for your students?

1. Tell me about the coursework you had at the college level that prepared you to teach writing.
2. What knowledge have you acquired at the college level as well as in your professional learning on the use of research-based writing strategies?
3. How has the knowledge of effective writing instructional practices that you acquired at the college level and in your professional learning impacted your writing instructional practices?
4. Share with me how often you collaborate with colleagues about writing instruction and the use of effective writing practices during the school year. Talk about what collaborative planning looks like at your school.
5. How do you feel the implementation of the writing common core standards have positively affected your writing instruction?
6. How has the implementation of the common core writing standards had an impact on your writing instruction?
7. What are your concerns about the implementation of the new CCSS writing standards in regard to writing instruction?
8. How do you continue to plan to accommodate for future needs including effective writing instructional strategies necessary to implement the writing standards mandated by CCSS?
9. What opportunities are provided for teachers at your school to continue to improve writing instruction practices

Appendix C: Focus Group Guide

Interviewer: Whitney Young	Interview Date:
Participant:	Interview Time:
Grade Level:	Years of teaching experience:

Guiding Question: How do classroom teachers feel that the knowledge acquired through training and their experiences in the classroom affect their ability to provide effective writing instruction for their students?

1. Would you share your experiences of teaching writing?
2. What type of coursework in your teacher preparation courses at the college level provided you with the knowledge of effective writing instruction?
3. What are some effective writing instructional practices you have acquired through professional learning at your school or through your language arts department in your school system?
4. How has the knowledge you have acquired through college coursework and any professional learning experiences prepared you to be able to motivate students to want to be successful writers?
5. As you have begun to implement the common core writing standards, would you tell us about any changes and/or modifications you have made in your instruction to adequately meet the needs of all learners in your classroom?
6. Would you tell us some effective teaching practices in writing you use in your classroom that have had a significant impact on improving student achievement?
7. What are any challenges that you see with fully implementing the CCSS writing standards?
8. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Appendix D: Individual Interview Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a research project study of Supporting Teachers in Effective Writing Instruction. You have been selected for the study because you are a certified teacher in grades 3-5 at the local school with experience in teaching writing in the elementary classroom. Please read the information contained in this form and feel free to ask any questions you have before agreeing to be a participant in the individual interview.

My name is Whitney Young. I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to examine the lived experiences of classroom teachers and their knowledge and training of effective writing instruction practices.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview at a later date. The interviews will be audio recorded. The time to complete the interview should be approximately 30 minutes. I understand that your time is limited, and I appreciate your willingness to support this study.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your current or future affiliations with _____. If you initially decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

There are no risks associated with participating in this study. There are no benefits to participating in this study. In the event you experience stress or anxiety during your participation in the study, you may withdraw at any time. You may refuse to answer any questions you consider stressful or invasive.

Compensation:

There is no compensation for participating in this study.

Confidentiality:

In any report of this study that might be published, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be kept in a secure, locked location. Only

the researcher will have access to the records. I will provide you with a copy of your signed informed consent form for your records.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Whitney Young. The researcher may be contacted at whitney.young3@waldenu.edu. The researcher's faculty advisor is Dr. Lucy Pearson, and you may contact her at lucy.pearson@waldenu.edu.

Statement of Consent:

_____I have read the above information. I have asked questions if necessary and received answers.

I consent to participation in this study.

Printed Name of Participant _____

Participant Signature _____

Researcher's Signature _____

Appendix E: Focus Group Interview Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a research project study of Supporting Teachers in Effective Writing Instruction. You have been selected for the study because you are a certified teacher in grades 3-5 at the local school with experience in teaching writing in the elementary classroom. Please read the information contained in this form and feel free to ask any questions you have before agreeing to be a participant in the focus group interview.

My name is Whitney Young. I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to examine the lived experiences of classroom teachers and their knowledge and training of effective writing instruction practices.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in a focus group interview with six total teachers at a later date. The interview will be audio recorded. The time to complete the interview should be approximately 45 minutes. I understand that your time is limited, and I appreciate your willingness to support this study.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your current or future affiliations with _____. If you initially decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

There are no risks associated with participating in this study. There are no benefits to participating in this study. In the event you experience stress or anxiety during your participation in the study, you may withdraw at any time. You may refuse to answer any questions you consider stressful or invasive.

Compensation:

There is no compensation for participating in this study.

Confidentiality:

In any report of this study that might be published, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be kept in a secure, locked location. Only the researcher will have access to the records. I will provide you with a copy of your signed informed consent form for your records. It is requested that information shared during the focus group interview is not discussed once the interview session is deemed complete and that all information shared remains confidential.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Whitney Young. The researcher may be contacted at whitney.young3@waldenu.edu. The researcher's faculty advisor is Dr. Lucy Pearson, and you may contact her at lucy.pearson@waldenu.edu. In the event you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a participant, contact a Walden University researcher participant's advocate at 612-312-1210 or irb@waldenu.edu.

Statement of Consent:

_____I have read the above information. I have asked questions if necessary and received answers.

I consent to participation in this study.

Printed Name of Participant _____

Participant Signature _____

Researcher's Signature _____

Appendix F: Original Interview Guide

Research Questions

1. What knowledge and skills do teachers need to possess in order to be effective instructors of writing?

2. What experiences of teachers as writing instructors indicate the need for additional training to become more effective in writing instruction?

Interviewer: Whitney Young	Interview Date:
Interviewee:	Interview Time:
Grade Level:	Years of teaching experience:

Interview Guide:

Guiding Question: What knowledge and skills do teachers need to possess in order to be effective instructors of writing?

1. Tell me about the coursework you had at the college level that prepared you to teach writing.
2. Do you feel that the training you received at the college level prepared you to effectively teach writing to elementary students?
3. Do you feel that you acquired adequate knowledge and training to begin teaching very basic writing as a novice teacher when you first began teaching in an elementary classroom?
4. How often do you collaborate with colleagues about writing instruction and the use of effective writing practices during the school year?
5. Have you participated in any professional learning on effective writing practices within the past year?
6. Describe the positive effects, if any, of the writing standards being implemented in the CCSSI.
7. Describe the negative effects, if any, of the writing standards being implemented in the CCSS.
8. What are your concerns about the implementation of the new CCSS writing standards in regard to writing instruction?
9. Do you feel prepared to move forward with effective writing instructional strategies necessary to implement the CCSS writing standards?
10. Do you feel that the writing instruction delivered by teachers in classrooms at your local school is highly engaging and motivates students to be successful writers?